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NASIKER

Victorian Anthropology

George W. Stocking, Jr.



THE FREE PRESS
A Division of Macmillan, Inc.
New York

Maxwell Macmillan Canada
Toronto

Maxwell Macmillan International
New York Oxford Singapore Sydney

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 DATA 01/07/1997
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The Free Press
 A Division of Macmillan, Inc.
 866 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022

Maxwell Macmillan Canada, Inc.
 1200 Eglinton Avenue East
 Suite 200
 Don Mills, Ontario M3C 3N1

Macmillan, Inc. is part of the Maxwell Communication Group of Companies.

First Free Press Paperback Edition 1991

Printed in the United States of America

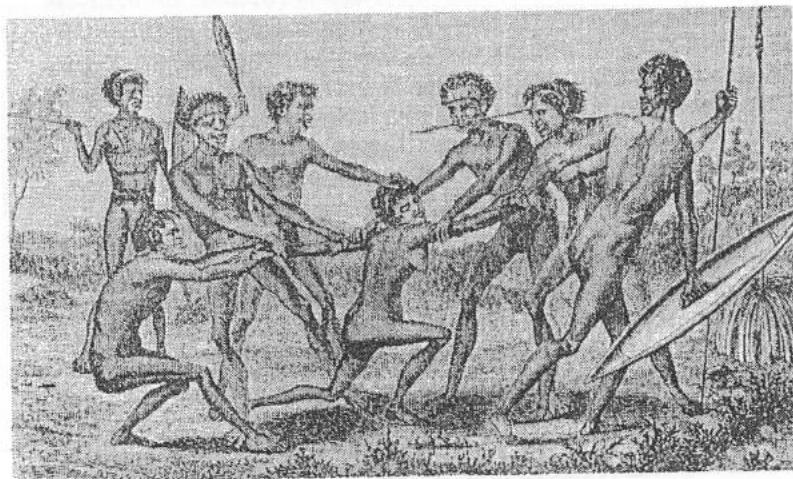
printing number

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
 Stocking, George W.
 Victorian Anthropology.

1. Ethnology — Great Britain — History — 19th century.
 2. Social Evolution — History. I. Title.
 GN308 .3 .G7S76 1987 306'.0941 86-18370
 ISBN 0-02-931551-4

Victorian Cultural Ideology and the Image of Savagery (1780–1870)



"Australian Aboriginal Marriage Ceremony"—1870

John Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (London, 1870), p. 74—from which the caption is taken.

IN reviewing Spencer's *Principles of Sociology* in 1877, Tylor suggested that it was the "besetting sin" of all who studied primitive man "to treat the savage mind according to the needs of our argument, sometimes as extremely ignorant and inconsequent, at other times as extremely observant and logical."¹ This double image of savagery, especially evident in Lubbock, is worthy of further consideration. When what is ostensibly the same phenomenon is treated in apparently contradictory ways, there may be other motives involved than the immediate demands of argument. Indeed, one suspects that the need Lubbock and his confreres felt to fill the cultural gap between the inhabitants of Brixham Cave and those of Belgrave Square, and the consequently un-Darwinian character of much of their evolutionary argument, may reflect more general historical processes than the polemical logic of the Darwinian debate.

What have been called the "ulterior motives" of Victorian sociocultural evolutionary anthropology have been suggestively discussed in terms of the need to exorcise the specter of relativism threatening British intellectuals after "the collapse of systematic utilitarianism and the weakening of traditional religious belief." Evolutionism has also been seen as the ideological reflection of economic exploitation and class conflict in an age of rapid capitalist economic development and imperial expansion. While evolutionism surely offered intellectual balm for minds sorely anguished by philosophical and religious doubt, and no doubt functioned ideologically to buttress hierarchical and exploitative relationships both at home and abroad, neither the "bogey of relativism" nor the "apology for domination" do full justice to the complex and ambivalent motives of those who wrote the major works of sociocultural evolutionism.²

To get at the motives of historical actors is an inherently speculative matter; to speak of some of them as "ulterior" introduces further difficulty, since it implies the possibility that actors may somehow deceive us as to their motivation, or that they are not fully aware of its complexities. Although we have ample reason in the world of daily experience and in the literature of dynamic psychology to accept both these possibilities, there is also good reason to be cautious in approaching intellectual history in these terms. Psychohistory is a risky venture even for the initiate; the sociological equivalent, which conflates "ulterior personal motive" with "latent ideological function," is equally problematic. And yet a history of evolutionary thinking which did not attempt to consider the possibility that it was molded by the broader cul-

clined to encourage an attempt to accommodate religious truth to the evolving human spirit. It was one thing to find, as some searching Victorians did, traces of more general religious truth in the myths of other peoples; it was quite another to reduce the Christian Bible to the general category of myth. Maine's evangelical godfather, now Archbishop Sumner of Canterbury, spoke for all the bishops in questioning how the authors—six of whom were clergymen—could honestly subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles. Two of them were in fact found guilty of heterodoxy in ecclesiastical courts; and although that decision was subsequently reversed by the Privy Council, their theological liberalism did not become really acceptable within the Church of England until the 1880s.⁶

It was in the larger context focused around the controversy over *Essays and Reviews*, as well as that of the Darwinian debate itself, that the sociocultural evolutionists dealt with the problem of religion. What we know of their early life indicates that they all grew up in religious homes, that in varying degrees they were all touched by doubt, that some among them were involved in the defense of the "Septem contra Christum," and that all of them were active propagators of the new orthodoxy of positive science. It is important not to lose sight of this active role. The sociocultural evolutionists did not merely respond to intellectual revolution; they marched in its ranks.⁷

Although we no longer accept simplistic views of the "warfare of science with theology," there is a danger that an historiography sensitive to the manifold ways in which traditional beliefs condition the emergence of new viewpoints may lose sight of real historical discontinuity. Victorian doubters did not question the traditional grounds of faith without ambivalence, or advocate heterodoxy without caution. Intellectual accommodations, either in process or in retrospect, softened the edge of controversy on both sides: at the ultimate metaphysical margin, Spencer found only "the Unknowable"; in the end, most theologians were able to accept the notion that evolution offered simply "a grander view of the Creator." But the issues were still sharp enough to lacerate the minds of contemporary actors, and even disinterested historical retrospect must acknowledge that "all that pain, doubt, fear, and confusion were not based on nothing." In the 1860s Tylor sometimes reassured his readers—and perhaps still even himself—that there was no conflict between true Christianity and the results of modern science. But in 1883, when Huxley's "agnosticism" had gained a certain degree of intellectual respectability, and theology, forced from the field it had so long shared with science, was taking to itself the burden of accommodation, Tylor was able to acknowledge—albeit in stanzas contributed anonymously to Andrew Lang's "Double Ballade of Primitive Man"—that the "mild anthropologist" had a more frankly "revolutionary"

impulse: "Theologians all to expose,—'Tis the mission of Primitive Man."⁸

Even so, there is evidence to suggest that the heterodoxy Tylor propagated may have functioned as a substitute for the more traditional belief of his youth. There is a hint of the substitutionary atonement offered by natural science in the record of his experiences with spiritualism. For some Victorians, the spiritualist movement was the post-Darwinian analogue to phrenology, providing a bridge back from a soulless secular meliorism toward the spiritual world they had lost. Alfred Russel Wallace was one such—but not, however, Tylor. In 1872, when recent spiritualist manifestations attracted notice in the public press, Tylor came up from his home in Somerset to investigate them at first hand. In the course of seances with leading mediums, he witnessed phenomena that seemed to contravene the laws of nature: table rappings, clairvoyance, and even levitation. Much he felt was merely legerdemain—"except that *legerté* is too complimentary for the clumsiness of many of the obvious imposters." But there was a residue which, although largely dependent on the testimony of others, was in fact attested by respectable middle-class gentlemen whose judgment he was not inclined to question: "I admit to a *prima facie* case on evidence, and will not deny that there may be a psychic force causing raps, movements, levitations, etc." Nonetheless, he concluded his "Notes on 'Spiritualism'" by affirming that "seeing has not (to me) been believing"; and despite his evident private perplexity, he used this first-hand experience in his published work only to document the general fraudulence of spiritualist phenomena.⁹

The point is not to argue that they were authentic, but merely to suggest that the evidence had not been such as to convince Tylor of this, and that his avowed incredulity, like the spiritualist believer's acceptance, may have been conditioned by ulterior emotional needs. Tylor paid a price for his scientific naturalism: "he who believes that his thread of life will be severed once and forever by the fatal shears, well knows that he wants a purpose and a joy in life, which belong to him who looks for a life to come." Having paid this price, Tylor was not about to abandon his naturalistic rationalism easily. For some Victorians spiritualism offered a surrogate for the emotional security provided by unquestioned religious belief; but for the confirmed scientific rationalist, spiritualist phenomena could be agents of doubt rather than reassurance. For those unwilling to follow Wallace in hypothesizing an extension of scientific law to include them, the only alternative was to dismiss the phenomena themselves. In this context, seeing could hardly be believing, and there was at least a touch of unintended irony in the definition of faith with which Tylor closed his diary: "Blessed are they that have seen, and yet have believed."¹⁰

tural experience of evolutionary writers, or that it served other purposes than to answer certain scientific questions, would scarcely do justice to a viewpoint which its advocates were inclined to see as relevant to all spheres of human life. As a relatively unpresumptuous starting point for such contextualization, we may perhaps take a methodological hint from recent slang, and ask what it was that seems to have been "bugging" them: what were the gnawingly irritating contemporary concerns that required extended intellectual scratching?

Regarding their works as appendices to the *Origin of Species*, one might expect the sociocultural evolutionists to have been interested in the evolution of every manifestation of human faculty. But a glance at their tables of contents suggests that not all things human were of equal interest to them. Two-thirds of Lubbock's *Origin of Civilisation* was devoted to two particular human institutions: religion and marriage—which were respectively the primary interest of Tylor and of McLennan.³ Nor is this to be explained in terms of the polemical logic of the Darwinian debate. Human marriage was at best of peripheral interest to that debate; and if the institution of religion was more centrally implicated, its overriding importance clearly reflects certain broader processes at work both in Victorian culture and the psyches of Victorian anthropologists.

Thus one way to get at "ulterior motives" may be to look more closely at the specific substance of the evolutionary argument, and to relate it to the life-historical experience of the evolutionary generation. With apologies to specialist historians of the period, and without venturing too far into the methodologically uncertain grounds of psychohistory or ideological analysis, perhaps we may also offer some speculations about the general psychological, social, and cultural processes implicated in sociocultural evolutionism, and even about its latent functions. In the end, we may come back to relativism and domination. But along the way, we may cast further light upon that paradoxical double image of savagery.

Animistic Religion and the Progress of Human Reason

The eagerness with which some men embraced Darwinism, and the need they felt to defend a natural rather than a supernatural causation in the realm of culture, suggests a considerable prior weakening of religious belief—a personal prefiguring of the more general "Victorian crisis of faith" to which Darwinism was a major contributing factor. What Tylor called "the great intellectual movement of the last two centuries" had not been reversed, but only channeled, by the religious revival that did so much to mold British society and culture in the early nineteenth century. As the contrast between Whewell and Mill suggests, there were

in the 1830s strongly conflicting trends within what has been called the "common context" of early Victorian thought. And by the end of that decade its fabric was already beginning to fray, as the woof threads of natural theology were stretched by developments in natural science, and the warp threads of biblical revelation were stained by the corrosive of "higher criticism." True, the scientific pull was exerted largely by men who still accepted God's providential role, and the source of the corrosive was quite far off beyond the Rhine. But there were other more readily accessible grounds for questioning traditional belief. Paradoxically, the heightened moral sensibility of the evangelical period sometimes led the younger generation to wonder about such fundamental dogmas as eternal damnation and substitutionary penal atonement. Many came to feel with Herbert Spencer that it was "absolutely and immeasurably unjust" for all of Adam's guiltless descendants to be damned for a piece of disobedience "which might have caused a harsh man to discharge his servant."⁴

In the 1850s such doubt was still a very personal problem. Although the irreligion of the urban masses was a matter of some concern, organized skepticism was barely beginning to ripple the surface of the culturally pervasive religiosity. Even so, influences sapping traditional religious belief were already at work within the Church itself—where they were expressed in an attempt to reinterpret Christianity in a form that doubt could not so easily assail. Convinced that it was "no longer possible to ignore the results of criticism," certain Broad Church heritors of an earlier Liberal Anglican generation sought in German thought—as mediated by Max Müller's mentor Baron Bunsen—the means to demonstrate to educated Britons the compatibility of the critical spirit with an enlightened Christian belief. Drawing heavily on Bunsen's biblical researches, the seven prominent Anglican liberals who published *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 offered a doctrine of gradual spiritual progress, in which the "lesson of humanity" was at each point adapted to man's developing faculties: in its childhood, the human race was governed by the positive rules of the Mosaic Law; in its youth, by the example of Christ; in its current manhood, by "the teaching of the Spirit within." The form of belief was therefore to be adapted to the national character, which in Britain in "an age of physical research like the present" took for granted "the grand foundation of universal law." In this context, even Darwin's *Origin* could be incorporated into the divine plan, and the moral lesson of the Bible could be identified with the "voice of conscience."⁵

But if all this was reassuring to religious liberals, it was more than a bit unsettling to the leaders of the Church of England. Threatened on the one side by a resurgent Roman Catholicism and on the other by Nonconformist attacks on its Establishment position, they were not in-

What was at issue was the very essence of religion, which Tylor had defined as "the belief in Spiritual Beings," and which he saw as fundamentally antithetic to "Materialistic philosophy." He had in fact elaborated his theory in the context of prior familiarity with the spiritualist movement, and he had chosen the term "animism" to designate the essential core of all religion because the more directly descriptive term "spiritualism" had been preempted by the modern sect. Like his own experience with spiritualism, his whole evolutionary scheme may be regarded as an attempt to explain away the apparently irrational or supernatural.¹¹

Even at its most primitive level, religion was far from "being a rubbish-heap of miscellaneous folly," but was built on principles that were "essentially rational, though working in a mental condition of intense and inveterate ignorance." It seemed to Tylor "as though thinking men, as yet at a low level of culture, were deeply impressed by two groups of biological problems"—the difference between a living body and a dead one, and the nature of the human shapes that appeared in dreams and visions. From these two groups of phenomena, the "ancient savage philosophers" made "the obvious inference" that every man, in addition to his body, had a life and a phantom. By a second inference these were combined into the notion of a "ghost-soul"—a "thin unsubstantial human image," the "cause of life or thought in the individual it animates," capable "of leaving the body far behind," and "continuing to exist and appear to men after the death of that body." Far from being "arbitrary or conventional," these doctrines answered "in the most forcible way to the plain evidence of men's senses"—as the continuity of animistic thought in the modern world attested.¹²

It was as though primitive man, in an attempt to create science, had accidentally created religion instead, and mankind had spent the rest of evolutionary time trying to rectify the error. Culture—a term that Tylor used always in the singular and usually in a developmental sense—was a dual process. Religion itself had evolved "upwards from the simplest theory which attributes life and personality to animal, vegetable and mineral alike—through that which gives to stone and plant and river guardian spirits which live among them and attend to their preservation, growth, and change—up to that which sees in each department of the world the protecting and fostering care of an appropriate divinity, and at last of one Supreme Being ordering and controlling the lower hierarchy." But parallel to this development there was another: "through all these gradations of opinion we may thus see fought out, in one stage after another, the long-waged contest between the theory of animation which accounts for each phenomenon of nature by giving it everywhere a life like our own, and a slowly-growing natural science which in one department after another substitutes for independent voluntary action the working out of systematic law."¹³

If religious belief was the theoretical science of primitive man, religious ritual was its utilitarian application. Rites and ceremonies were "means of intercourse with and influence on spiritual beings, and as such, their intention is as directly practical as any chemical or mechanical process." Like the beliefs on which they were based, the "absurdities" of primitive sacrifice had their origin not in fraud, but "rather in genuine error": "if the main proposition of animistic natural religion be granted, that the idea of the human soul is the model of the idea of deity, then the analogy of man's dealing with man ought *inter alia*, to explain his motives in sacrifice." Just as the common man offered gifts to the great, to gain good or avert evil, so did the savage to his deity. All that was necessary to "produce a logical doctrine of sacrificial rites" was "proper adaptation of the means of conveying the gift." The irrationality of sacrifice was a secondary development, the reflection of the "usual ritualistic change" from "practical reality to formal ceremony." Thus men invented new ideas about their deities, but kept up old sacrifices nonetheless, "in spite of their having become practically unreasonable." Whereas new rites were seldom introduced "without rational motive," old ones were kept up by force of habit "after their meaning has fallen away."¹⁴

The irrational was thus the outcome of a twofold process: on the one hand, it was created by invention, when primitive men, like Locke's madmen, reasoned soundly from false premises or inadequate experience;¹⁵ on the other, it was a product of survival, when things that were originally rational in motive became meaningless or absurd as they persisted by the sheer force of conservatism into a new intellectual context. By contrast, scientific rationality itself, like the conservatism of habit, was an unanalyzed category in Tylor's thought. That men should seek to understand and control the forces of nature, that they should persist in outmoded ways of thought, required no extended explanation. To the heritor of utilitarian liberalism, these were the forces that defined the polemical field; the one was self-validating; the other could be given no more than a contingent justification.

And yet the problem of the positive functions of religious belief could not be entirely ignored. Traditionalists insisted that without it social order was impossible—that morality and law could be validated only by divine authority, without which chaos would ensue. Against this, secular rationalists, echoing the words of George Eliot, might have argued their own experience: though God was "inconceivable," and Immortality "unbelievable," Duty was still "peremptory and absolute." But there remained the problem, as Tylor put it, that "unbelievers in [a] second life share ethical principles which have been more or less shaped under its influence." To establish an independent basis for moral behavior, he insisted on an evolutionary separation between morality and religion. The evidence of savage religion in fact disproved "the popular

idea that the moral government of the universe is an essential tenet of natural religion." But if savage animism was "almost devoid" of ethical content, this did not mean that "morality is absent from the life of the lower races." Far from it: "without a code of morals, the very existence of the rudest tribe would be impossible." True, religion and morality had subsequently become intimately linked through the idea of retribution in a future life; and looked at "from a political point of view," it was clear that this linkage had been a powerful influence on human history, providing just the sanction which traditionalists required. But just as the linkage was not original, neither was it irrevocable—among the most advanced sectors of British society there were many like Tylor who believed in "a positive morality which shall of its own force control the acts of men."¹⁶

In the end, the study of *Primitive Culture*, far from undermining law and morals, helped to place them on a sounder basis than ever before. The "practical import" of Tylor's study was to determine "how far are modern opinion and conduct based on the strong ground of soundest modern knowledge, or how far only on such knowledge as was available in the earlier and ruder stages of culture where their types were shaped." It was the function of ethnography to "bridge the gap" between those laws and maxims that a people "made fresh, according to the information and circumstance" of a "particular stage of its history," and those which became current merely "by inheritance from an earlier stage, only more or less modified" to make them compatible with new conditions. Fortunately, the oft-closed gates of discovery and reform were now open at their widest, and though they might be shut once more, it was also possible that scientific method would "start the world on a more steady and continuous course of progress."¹⁷

Toward that end, ethnography had a double task. By impressing men's minds with the "doctrine of development" it would encourage them "to continue the progressive work of past ages." Seeing reason operating in history, they would take hold of it consciously as a weapon and undertake the second "harsher, and at times even painful, office of ethnography": "to expose the remains of crude old culture which have passed into harmful superstition, and to mark these out for destruction." Active thus both in "aiding progress and removing hindrance," Tylor's science of culture was "essentially a reformer's science."¹⁸

In relation to traditional Christianity, its implications were more radical than Tylor's peroration might suggest. He tactfully declined to take up personally the ethnographer's second "harsher task," limiting himself to a "slight allusion" here and there, and leaving it to the "educated reader" to "work out their general bearing on theology." But his allusions in fact indicated that this bearing was "very close," and that the "actual truth of religious systems" was at issue. Insisting on "the con-

nexion which runs through religion, from its rudest forms up to the status of an enlightened Christianity," he proceeded to show that the human soul, the hope of immortality, and the very idea of God were products of human reason gone astray, and that the major rituals of modern Christendom had rational meaning only within the framework of an earlier barbaric philosophy. Natural caution and ingrained respectability led Tylor to imply that some current religious doctrines might survive ethnographic criticism, but it was by no means clear which, if any, these might be. No doubt many "educated readers" finished *Primitive Culture* with their faith intact, but the logical thrust of the book was clearly to reduce Christianity to the same category of "mythology" with which Tylor prefaced his discussion of the development of animistic belief. Rather than God having created man in His image, man had, through evolutionary time, created God in his; and his ritual relations with his slowly created Creator were modelled on his social relations with other human beings.¹⁹

As Max Müller later suggested, with just a touch of irony, the science of culture was "Mr. Tylor's science"; and the question may be asked to what extent his thinking about religion was representative even of that small group whom we have treated as the sociocultural evolutionists. Clearly, they did not all equally share Tylor's heterodox impulses. Pitt Rivers had not banished God from history entirely—though he recognized that in this he was unrepresentative of his fellow evolutionists, and he did not write about the evolution of religion. Lubbock, whose real interest in the established social order was also quite large, was not inclined to affront tradition directly, and emphasized the positive role of science in elevating and purifying religious belief. McLennan's heterodox impulses found outlet for the most part in other areas, and Spencer was more inclined as he grew older to recognize the positive functions of religion. Quite aside from these differences of impulse, there were differences in argument as well. Lubbock felt that savage religion might better be discussed as "superstition," since "it differs essentially from ours"; and although he felt it was "to a great extent a matter of definition," he later came to the conclusion that "the lower races have no religion." Stimulated by a book treating *Tree and Serpent Worship* in diffusionist and racial terms, McLennan became preoccupied with the traditional "problem of idolatry," which he transmitted to later Victorians in the form of "totemism." Spencer gave a central place to ancestor worship, and in contrast to Tylor saw religion and ethics as "originally one" and thenceforth progressively differentiating, until in modern times they had become "quite distinct."²⁰

But despite these differences of impulse and argument, there was a substantial unity underlying the sociocultural evolutionist approach to religion. Whether by diffusion or independent invention, they all ac-

cepted an essentially Tylorian view of the origin of religious belief. Though he did not refer to Tylor, Lubbock discussed "the religious theories of savages" in terms of the spirit which "seems to desert the body" during sleep. McLennan explicitly acknowledged his debt to Tylor's "animation hypothesis"—though he followed terminologically in the tradition of De Brosses and Comte by defining totemism as "fetichism" plus certain sociological "peculiarities" (notably, exogamy and matrilineal inheritance). As for Spencer, his ancestor worship was predicated on a "ghost-theory" so similar to Tylor's animism that the two engaged in a rather acrimonious dispute as to its originality and priority.²¹

All of them, in short, may be regarded as members of what later social anthropologists were to call the "English" or "intellectualist" school, which approached religion in terms of individual rationalistic psychology, neglecting its emotional bases, its symbolic and ritual aspects, and its social functions.²² While such an approach no doubt reflected more general aspects of the English intellectual tradition, it had its basis also in the religious experience of the sociocultural evolutionists. Coming from staunchly Protestant Low Church or Nonconformist backgrounds, they naturally gave priority to belief rather than ritual—which by unstated definition (or the juxtaposition of the modifier "merely") was that which had no present function, though it may once have had a rational utilitarian basis. Belief was not only prior, but critically problematic in their own lives, since they were losing it, along with the emotional security it had once provided. In a culture where religious commitment was still a measure of respectability, this loss threatened them with reprobation and even with guilt—since by savoring too much of the fruit of science they had connived in their own disillusion. It was psychologically essential that this whole process be given some ultimate validation, and this evolutionism provided. If religious belief had never been divinely inspired, but was only a product of the human mind, there could be no guilt involved in replacing it with a better product of the human mind. Thus the loss of faith could be vindicated by the upward march of human reason.

They were aware, to some extent, that as an approach to the understanding of religion their viewpoint was a limited one. As Spencer put it: "while the current creed was slowly losing its hold on me, the sole question seemed to be the truth or untruth of the particular doctrines I had been taught." Later, he had gradually come to realize that there were other questions as well. Similarly, Tylor was aware that ritual had an "expressive and symbolic" aspect as well as a utilitarian one, and that he had failed almost completely to deal with the "religion of vision and passion." He justified himself on the grounds that selectivity was at times necessary for "scientific progress." And "scientific progress" was of course absolutely essential to his worldview. Having helped

to undermine belief, it took upon itself the burdens belief had carried. It gave meaning to human life and direction to human history. Human reason, fallen into primitive animism, was slowly redeemed by science, culminating in the evolutionary viewpoint. And as the Creator retreated from the stage, sociocultural evolutionists themselves could take on the creative role, explaining to mankind how all that God had given had in fact been wrought.²³

Primitive Promiscuity and the Evolution of Marriage

One of the most important of God's gifts to man was holy matrimony—an "honourable estate, instituted of God in paradise, in the time of man's innocence," to be used not "to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly" for the procreation of children, the avoidance of fornication, and for "mutual society, help, and comfort." Thus was marriage described in the Book of Common Prayer, whose rite was until 1836 the only form of legal marriage in England (save for Jews and Quakers); and we have already seen in the case of McLennan that even advocates of Scottish informality did not in 1860 question the divine institution underlying it. But as McLennan's article on the law of marriage suggests, that institution was by then not quite so stable as the dominant cultural ideology would have had it.²⁴

The historiography of marriage, family, sexuality, and gender has burgeoned so explosively in recent years that any attempt to use their early Victorian manifestations as a stable "patriarchal" reference point must give even the nonspecialist historian pause. The declining importance of kinship ties beyond the nuclear core and the increasing emphasis on affective bonds as opposed to economic functions have been traced to 1500; and the "more companionate and egalitarian nuclear family of the eighteenth century" has been contrasted with the heightened patriarchalism characterizing internal family relationships in the two preceding centuries. But the attempt to get behind the stereotypic notions that are our heritage from the first post-Victorian generation has yet to produce a satisfactory synthesis; and even allowing for all the complexities that such a synthesis would encompass, it still seems safe to say that the dominant attitudes in matters relating to gender and sexuality in the early Victorian era were by present standards patriarchal and repressive.²⁵

Patriarchal ideals still governed much of British social and political life in the early nineteenth century and, in the context of religious revival and the fear of revolution, had in fact been strengthened in certain areas—including most notably the home. As far as Henry Maine was

concerned, legal conceptions governing the family were still in principle as patriarchal as in ancient Rome: he suggested to his readers that "the nature of the ancient *Patria Potestas*" could be brought "vividly before the mind" merely by "reflecting on the prerogatives attached to the husband by the pure English Common law." Although marriage itself was a form of contract, the relations it defined were those of status, in the sense that various rights and disabilities were imposed on the parties by virtue of their standing in the legal relationship of husband and wife. According to Christian tradition, marriage united two individuals in one person, and English law defined that person as the husband. As Blackstone had put it, a wife's "very being or legal existence" was incorporated into that of her husband. Unless there was specific contractual provision to forestall it, marriage brought her personal and real property under his complete control, and she herself became in effect his chattel in both an economic and a physical sense. Just as she *belonged* to him, so did the children that she bore him—he could, if he chose, deny her all access to them, even to the point of giving them over to his mistress. His powers included the right to vent aggressive impulses on her person for the purpose of legitimate chastisement: he could beat her, so long as he did not do it "in a violent or cruel manner." Nor were these perquisites and penalties much affected by the early movement against inherited privilege—the Reform Act of 1832 in fact gave sanction to female political disabilities that had previously been only customary.²⁶

There was of course a difference between legal status and either the cultural ideology or the actual behavior of family relationships. But if early Victorian women were placed on an ideological pedestal, they were in many respects more constrained than they had been in the eighteenth century. A critical indicator was the restriction of the economic activities of middle-class women, as the home became separated from business premises constantly increasing in scale, and growing wealth sustained the withdrawal of women into a purely domestic sphere. With the sharper differentiation of the domain of work and the domain of love, the middle-class family home came to be seen as a refuge from the harsh male world of competitive individualism—in Ruskin's words, "the place of Peace," a sacred "temple of the hearth" sheltered from terror, doubt, division, and all the other anxieties rampant in the "hostile society of the outer world." Outside, it was the role of the husband to "encounter all peril and trial," and he would often be wounded or subdued, and "always hardened." Inside, it was the role of the wife to create an oasis of peace and emotional stability—not only to maintain the outward appearance of order and comfort, but to build around every domestic scene "a strong wall of confidence, which no internal suspicion can undermine, no external enemy break through." She was priestess of the Victorian religious cult of hearth and home, and on her shoulders "fell the

burden of stemming the amoral and irreligious drift of modern society."²⁷

Fortunately, God and Nature had conspired to fit women for this holy role. Age-old Christian tradition and contemporary physiological assumption both sustained the view of woman as a being destined for a purely domestic sphere. The literal interpretation of Genesis mandated self-sacrificing devotion to human reproduction as punishment for all ill-conceived female pursuit of knowledge. Contemporary medical opinion sustained the view that woman was a being "little capable of reasoning, feeble and timid," and naturally subject to the governance of the stronger and more rational male. But if her "far more sensitive and susceptible" mental makeup left her liable to a variety of nervous disorders, the instincts associated with ovulation underwrote the ideal characteristics that her role as priestess of the home demanded: domesticity, passivity, affection, nurturance, and intuitive morality.²⁸

There was, however, a worm of ambiguity in the bud of ideal womanhood. Prisoners of their reproductive cycles, women were beings "both higher and lower, both innocent and animal, pure yet quintessentially sexual." A creature so constituted might be expected to be the subject of massive cultural ambivalence. The explicit cultural ideology idealized her "angel instincts": she was "the hope of society," on whom depended "the righting of wrongs, the correcting of sins, and the success of all missions." But if the ideal wife and mother was "so pure-hearted as to be utterly ignorant of and averse to any sensual indulgence," the alternate cultural image of the "fallen woman" conveys a hint of an underlying preoccupation with the threat of uncontrolled female sexuality. Thus a writer in the *Westminster Review* in 1850 found it fortunate for society that women, "whose position and education have protected them from exciting causes, constantly pass through life without ever being cognizant of the promptings of the senses." Had nature not enacted and education not reinforced this "kind decision," the consequences would be "frightening." To avoid them, a considerable cultural effort was expended to keep the forces of human sexuality under firm control.²⁹

The well-known cultural paraphernalia of Victorian sexual repression require no extended reiteration—though it may help to recall that they did not emerge full-blown in 1837. Deeply rooted in aspects of the Christian and specifically the Puritan tradition, more explicitly elaborated during the moral reformation of the middle and upper classes in the Evangelical Revival, the sexual values and attitudes we call Victorian were already established by 1830—quite soon enough to shape the personal character of their most eminent cultural exemplar, Queen Victoria herself. Although there was later elaboration in some areas and loosening in others, the basic structure of taboos was already defined: the

renunciation of all sexual activity save the procreative intercourse of Christian marriage; the education of both sexes in chastity and continence; the secrecy and cultivated ignorance surrounding sex; the bowdlerization of literature and euphemistic degradation of language; the general suppression of bodily functions and all the "coarser" aspects of life—in short, the whole repressive pattern of purity, prudery, and propriety that was to condition sexual behavior for decades to come.³⁰

The structure did not of course weigh equally on both sexes. The persistence of an older male-oriented ethos of aggressive sexuality may be glimpsed beneath its sublimation in the idea of "muscular Christianity." And for many of the males who did not live up to the cultural ideal, the age-old double standard of possessive patriarchy could justify if not legitimize a certain amount of premarital and even extramarital participation in a sexual underworld populated largely by lower-class women whose social situation, economic circumstances, and subcultural tradition did not sustain the image of angel innocence. It seems likely also that their sisters farther up the social scale were not so constrained as retrospective stereotype would have it. But despite the recent discovery of their role as agents of modernization in the home or as functionaries in the highly formalized "Society" that emerged to maintain the social coherence of the governing elite, there seems little doubt that the sexual and personal freedom of middle- and upper-class women were the focus of a powerful effort of cultural control. If child rearing and adolescent enculturation did not adequately internalize the values of the "perfect wife," then educational deprivation, economic dependence, demographic processes, legal tradition, and myriad forms of informal social control conspired to enforce them. And if their male counterparts did not always maintain dominion over the "mischievous wild beast" within, there seems little doubt that similar if somewhat less oppressive influences enforced upon many of them, too, a high degree of self-control.³¹

By the time John McLennan became interested in the evolution of marriage, however, the Victorian middle-class family was feeling the impact of pressures which, in the context of religious doubt, might well tend to make its divine institution seem somewhat problematic. As rising living standards and levels of aspiration made the paraphernalia of gentility ever more costly, the age of middle-class males at marriage rose significantly between 1840 and 1870. In the context of changing mortality rates and emigration patterns, this meant that a substantial number of "redundant women" were never to achieve the estate for which God had intended them. Within the middle-class family, the increasing economic cost of children, and the disinclination of some women to bear the physical cost, had begun to make its procreative purpose problematic, and by the 1860s one finds the first hints of an actual decline in

family size. Already by mid-century, manual labor within the family was becoming increasingly the function of a rapidly increasing class of domestic servants, and the older domestic virtues were beginning to lose their hold. A few middle-class women, chafing against the triviality that filled the leisure hours of the "perfect lady," had begun to question aspects of the patriarchal tradition, and the 1850s saw the emergence of a movement on behalf of certain women's rights. Although the most important early activity centered on questions of education and employment, the issues of married women's property and female suffrage were already in the air. All these matters occasioned considerable public interest, which extended to related issues bearing on human sexuality. Widespread concern with the growing incidence of prostitution led to the passage of a series of Contagious Diseases Acts, which subsequently became the target of feminist attack against the double standard; there was similar public upset at the prevalence of infanticide and abortion.³²

During the same period, breaches began to appear in the principles of the absolute indissolubility of the marriage vow. From the 1840s on, the question of permitting marriage to a deceased wife's sister was constantly before Parliament; and though it did not pass until 1907, opponents were well aware that what was at issue was whether marriage did indeed create two individuals of one flesh, or whether it was merely a contract terminable by death, and perhaps by other means as well. The 1850s also saw the first general legal recognition of such other means. Complete divorce (as opposed to a form of judicial separation granted in ecclesiastical courts) had hitherto been possible in Britain only by special Act of Parliament; and due to the great cost and the double standard, this meant that it was for practical purposes available only to aristocratic males, at a rate of roughly one a year since 1697. Acting on the earlier report of an investigative commission, in 1857 Parliament finally passed the first Matrimonial Causes Act, which enabled the middle classes generally to seek divorce in secular courts—although only for adultery, which if the wife were plaintiff had to be aggravated by some further abuse such as sodomy or rape. This act marked the beginning of seventy-five years of legislative reformation of the estate which God had instituted—most of it to the end of modifying its traditional patriarchal character.³³

That these years were also very nearly the exact period of the anthropological debate over the evolutionary priority of "matriarchal" marriage seems scarcely an historical coincidence. Certainly, McLennan's *Primitive Marriage*—the first assertion of that priority in Britain—shows evidences that its argument was conditioned by the contemporary concern with problems of human sexuality and by the processes of social change affecting the institution of human marriage. Although McLennan offered no explicit definition of marriage, and

showed a certain relativity in the recognition of its different "species," it is perfectly clear that "marriage proper" meant proper Victorian marriage. Its purpose was to control human (and especially female) sexuality, so that there might be "certainty of male parentage." Its critical diagnostic features were "the appropriation of women to particular men" and the "conception of conjugal fidelity." By the sociocultural evolutionary mode of reasoning from opposites, it followed that the first stage of its evolution was one of "promiscuity in the connection of the sexes"—even to the point of systematic incest. The actual evidence for the existence of such a stage was provided in a single ethnographic footnote, which referred to wife lending among the Chukchee and the Eimauk, the "licentious wantonness" of Patan women, the "incredible immorality" of the Gungorees, "frequent divorces" among the Bedouin, marriages of specified duration among Chinamen, and "similar or worse customs" that McLennan left unspecified. In the absence of any ethnographic evidence for a primitive state of general promiscuity, a *mélange* of ethnocentrically evaluated departures from the Victorian cultural norm served as proof of its possibility.³⁴

That McLennan also had in mind deviant behavior in his own society is clear enough: "Savages are unrestrained by any sense of delicacy from a copartnership in sexual enjoyments; and indeed, in the civilized state, the sin of great cities shows that there are no natural restraints sufficient to hold men back from grosser copartnerships." As he explained to Darwin subsequently, "promiscuity" denoted "the general conduct as to sexual matters of men without wives," and "our own time and towns" showed that many such men "just do as they can, and are neither over-nice nor over-scrupulous as to the manner." Savages were even less so: among the Australians, when a man found a desirable woman, "he forces her to accompany him by blows, ending by knocking her down and carrying her off." Indeed, McLennan's argument makes it clear that primitive marriage was in his mind little more than "rape." But if marriage by capture was associated with the aggressive and violent sexuality of the primitive male, the character of primitive marriage was also related to the laxity of female savage morals. Women "among rude tribes" were "usually depraved," and it was by means of polyandry, not polygyny, that humanity advanced from the originally promiscuous state. Here again, various aspects of the process reflect contemporary concerns. The "grosser copartnerships" of Victorian prostitution were an obvious model for primitive polyandrous marriage. The latter, significantly, was the result of demographic imbalance, though among savages it was men who were made "redundant" by female infanticide—a phenomenon which McLennan elsewhere made clear also had its modern urban analogue. By this process of inversion, even marriage with the deceased wife's sister found a place in McLennan's

scheme: the levirate, or marriage to the elder brother's widow, became critical evidence for the former existence of polyandry and the "successive stages" of its decay.³⁵

The evolution upward from promiscuity and polyandry was essentially the evolution of the "ideas" of kinship, fatherhood, wifehood, and propriety. In good empiricist fashion, McLennan argued that these ideas were not "innate," but had "*grown* like all other ideas related to matters primarily cognizable only by the senses." But they were also clearly subject to a teleology reflecting their outcome in the Victorian family. Although blood ties through females were "obvious and indisputable" even in a state of primitive promiscuity, it was only when men *perceived* what women *experienced* in childbirth that, following these ties through their mothers and other "females of the same blood," they arrived at "a system of kinship through females." Once female infanticide, wife capture, and exogamy had combined to produce the system of polyandry—and particularly the higher Tibetan form in which a group of brothers cohabited with one woman—the basis then existed for the idea of fatherhood, since paternity, although collective, was within these limits certain. From there the power and the example of chiefs monopolizing women to themselves, the "influence of ideas of propriety, which grew up under the improved marriage system," and, above all, the "growth of property" led gradually but inexorably to a full system of agnatic kinship. For, as McLennan suggested elsewhere, once the marriage system allowed a man to be certain of his parenthood of specific children, "nothing but the effect of custom" would prevent the system of female kinship from dying out: "Born to him in his own house; by blood and circumstance the nearest and dearest to him; all his natural feelings would prompt him to leave them his wealth."³⁶

On the one hand, then, McLennan had written an account of the rise of the idea of fatherhood; on the other, he had written an historical treatise on the "position of women." If they had lost the sexual freedom of "the early world," and the power that sometimes accompanied polyandry, they were protected by the progress of "refinement" from the violent sexuality of the primitive male. Polyandry—the earliest form of the marriage "contract"—had been a kind of training ground for men, giving them both the "idea of a wife" and "obligations in matters of sex." The relationships thus established were the ultimate basis for the Roman concept of the permanent consortship of one man and one woman, "with interests the same in all things civil and religious"—the idea which, "despite all woman's rights movements to the contrary," was "that destined to prevail in the world."³⁷

McLennan's views of the evolution of human marriage were controversial even among evolutionists. Lubbock regarded polyandry as an "exceptional phenomenon" rather than a "necessary stage in human

almost "finally and completely assimilated the legal position of women to the legal position of men"; and his work was circulated (with his permission) by feminist groups. Along similar lines, one might argue that if, as Tylor suggested, *Primitive Marriage* cost McLennan half of his law business, it seems unlikely that it was because it was perceived as reaffirming on evolutionary grounds the patriarchal basis of marriage; rather, it must have been because its evolutionary rejection of divinely instituted patriarchalism was felt to be subversive of existing domestic order.⁴³

In speculating about ulterior motives, it would be a mistake simply to rely on later statements such as McLennan's comment about women's rights movements or Spencer's reference to the "screaming sisterhood." Spencer's chapter on "The Rights of Women" in *Social Statics* had been so radical that Harriet Taylor sought to reprint it in some feminist essays she brought out in 1867. Spencer, however, did not agree; nor was he willing to support Mill's parliamentary petition for women's suffrage in the same year. Despite Spencer's protestations to the contrary, his later conservatism on this (and several other) issues would seem to represent a real shift of position, and not simply the revalorizing transformation of surrounding historical context that has been convincingly argued in relation to his early radicalism in general. Perhaps in the aftermath of that lost law practice, such a shift may also have taken place in McLennan, whose earlier work shows evidence of a more positive attitude toward "the equality of rights" between the sexes.⁴⁴

But granting that they may have become more conservative in later years on this and other issues, to see the social evolutionists as seeking to preserve "the essence of patriarchal theory" by eliminating its "archaic harshness" seems an oversimplifying interpretation of their views on "the position of women." Like many contemporary feminists, the social evolutionists accepted the culturally pervasive view of women's nature—which was in fact given a kind of scientific legitimation by Spencer. And no doubt their somewhat varied domestic lives reflected prevailing norms—perhaps especially in the case of Lubbock, who upon his father's death maintained the "traditional patriarchal character" of the family house, even assuming a "quasi-paternal position" in relation to his younger brothers. But insofar as the evolutionists incorporated into their thinking Maine's progress from status to contract, they placed modern marriage in the context of a general movement that was eroding patriarchal authority in all areas. And despite its obvious basis in ethnocentric assumption, the use of the modern status of women as a measure of progress in human marriage reflected values that in cultural context were both humane and antipatriarchal. What was being proclaimed, after all, was the replacement of relationships based upon "violence and

unwilling submission"—for which Grey's Australians were taken as the archetype—by those of "mutual affection" and "consent." If Lubbock echoed the prevailing domestic orthodoxy in praising "the Angels who make a Heaven of home," it was in the process of condemning the ancient Greeks for treating women "rather as housekeepers and playthings." And though later he still found "traces" of the idea of forceful enslavement in contemporary marriage law, he felt these were "curiously inconsistent with all our avowed ideas," maintaining that, in practice, English domestic relations were "more advanced."⁴⁵

Although far from sharing Mill's radicalism, the classical evolutionists, when viewed in the context of contemporary attitudes, were far from standing in the rearguard on issues relating to gender and marriage.⁴⁶ Insofar as they contributed to undermining the notion of divinely instituted patriarchalism, the immediate contemporary cultural impact of their writings on the origins of marriage might well be regarded as revolutionary; and if their account of its subsequent evolutionary development could be read as reaffirming patriarchal relations, that reaffirmation had, to say the least, a certain contingency, given the generally antipatriarchal character of recent evolutionary processes.

It is true, however, that once past those early radical statements of Herbert Spencer, there is nothing in social evolutionist writings on marriage as systematically radical in its implications as Tylor's quiet subversion of the principles of Christian belief. Even more than in the realm of religion, their attitudes and motives in relation to gender and sexuality were marked by ambiguity and ambivalence. For if the pursuit of human reason in the evolution of religion had threatening implications for psychological security and social order, this was even more the case in the realm of sexuality, where the evolutionary dynamism was not that of reason unbound but of instinct repressed. But to see that problem simply as a matter of controlling the "position of women" narrows its significance unnecessarily. In the realm of sexuality, the forces that had to be controlled existed also within the human male. Although Maine's methodology was pre-evolutionary, on this point he may stand as illustrative. According to Maine, the reason the position of women was a measure of civilization was because it was also a measure of "self-control"—"that same control which produces wealth by subduing the natural appetite of living for the present, and which fructifies in art and learning through subordinating a material and immediate to a remote, intangible, and spiritual enjoyment." Civilization was only possible on the basis of curbing "the strongest, because the primary, impulses of human nature." If these impulses were unspecified, Maine's use of women as his touchstone of control makes clear what Victorian reserve might otherwise obscure: they were the instinctive forces of human sex-

development," and preferred to see exogamy and infanticide as consequences of marriage by capture, rather than vice versa. Spencer, although drawing heavily on elements of McLennan's argument, found "reason for doubting [the] theory taken as a whole," and preferred to see endogamy and exogamy as alternative and coexisting adaptations to the perpetual hostility of primitive life—a captured wife becoming a "badge of social distinction" among the more aggressive tribes, while the weaker ones were of necessity endogamous. Tylor, who was inclined to leave questions of kinship and marriage to "legal minds used to the problem of contingent remainders," nonetheless indicated that considerable discussion with his friend McLennan had not enabled him to see the levirate as evidence of the prior existence of polyandry.³⁸

At a more general level, however, McLennan's conception of the development of human marriage was in fact accepted by the major sociocultural evolutionists. They all tended to view marriage in terms of the control of human sexuality, and took for granted some early condition of primitive promiscuity. They all accepted the general priority of matrilineal forms—although they also incorporated Maine's patriarchy as a later evolutionary phase. And of course they all saw the evolutionary process culminating in a monogamous family resembling that of mid-Victorian Britain. Because he was the least involved in the elaboration of this orthodoxy, Tylor is a good measure of its acceptance. Reviewing the debate between Maine and McLennan in 1885, he felt that "converging research" had established the "early general prevalence of the system of kinship on the female side, which seems so strange to the modern European, with his long-inherited patriarchal tendencies." And in an earlier article, he had suggested that it was admitted "by all students" that female kinship was itself evidence of marriage having previously been "in a low and promiscuous state."³⁹

But as Tylor's correspondence with Lorimer Fison would later reveal, primitive promiscuity proved itself a will-o'-the-wisp for late Victorian ethnographers: try as he might, Fison could not find the actual ethnographic exemplar toward which those deviations from monogamy in McLennan's footnote seemed to lead. As early as 1891, Edward Westermarck's *History of Human Marriage* (which rejected the notion of primitive promiscuity and the priority of matrifocal marriage) indicated that Tylor's consensus of "all students" was beginning to break down, and in 1896 Tylor himself noted that a "reaction" against the theory of "primitive matrimonial anarchy" was likely to cause it "to pass away altogether."⁴⁰

Without attempting to trace the process here, we may say that by the 1920s, the priority of matrilineal kinship was no longer taken for granted in mainstream anthropology, and the problem of primitive promiscuity had been replaced by the universality of the incest taboo.

"Matriarchy," which had rarely in fact been argued as a systematic social organizational alternative to "patriarchy," had been returned to the mythological realm of the Amazons—from which Johann Bachofen, its main proponent, had derived it in the first place. Although a breath of life has been infused into the matriarchy idea by some recent feminist writings, their influence in anthropology has been reflected rather in the concern with the impact of European expansion on gender relationships. From the perspective of modern anthropological theory, the nineteenth-century discussion has long seemed quaintly "dated"; from the viewpoint of a culturally contextualized historiography of anthropology, the grounding of this discussion in ulterior Victorian assumption seems undeniable.⁴¹

It has been suggested by one feminist historian that the "matriarchal" orthodoxy was a conscious ideological construction, an attempt to create a new evolutionary foundation for traditional male dominance once Maine's effort "to prove the timeless and inherent nature of patriarchal authority" had run aground on methodological difficulties. No longer the original form of the family, patriarchy became instead the goal of evolution; and lest modern women should take Bachofen's "matriarchy" as a primitivist golden age, later British evolutionists were at pains to show that women had at no time wielded domestic and political power. On the contrary, the pedestal of Victorian domesticity was the high point of evolutionary progress. As Herbert Spencer put it, "the moral progress of mankind" was in no way more clearly shown than by contrasting the "position of women" among savage and civilized nations: "At the one extreme a treatment of them cruel to the utmost degree bearable; and at the other extreme a treatment which, in some directions, gives them precedence over men." In this context, Spencer in fact later justified the limitation of women's political rights on evolutionary grounds: because the vital needs of reproduction arrested their individual mental evolution at an earlier age, and their characteristic mental traits (notably intuition and dissimulation) were those adapted to "dealing with infantine life" and relating to the stronger male, their present hereditary mental makeup would incline them to support authoritarian government and incautious (i.e., maternal) social policy.⁴²

The interpretation of social evolutionism as a conscious defense of the marital status quo, however, does not do justice to the complexities of intellectual connection, of ideological significance, and of ulterior motive. On the first point, suffice it to say that Bachofen's *Mutterrecht*, which was published in 1861, was neither a response to Maine nor a stimulus to McLennan, who did not read it until 1866. On the second, one notes that far from showing patriarchal authority "timeless," Maine in fact saw the increasing personal freedom, proprietary independence, and political privilege of women as a "law of development" that had

uality. Although the social evolutionists rejected Maine's picture of man's primeval social state, they shared with him an appreciation of the repression involved in its transcendence.⁴⁷

Savagery and Civilization in Early Victorian England

To bring together the philosopher savage of religious evolution and the bestial savage of sexual evolution it may help to look at the cultural experience of the evolutionary generation from a somewhat broader perspective. For just as evolutionary writings on religion and marriage reflect specific aspects of that experience, so did discussion of the overall evolution of human culture reflect the broader processes of sociocultural change transforming English society in the early nineteenth century.

Let us begin with a commonplace of Victorian historiography: British intellectuals born in the early decades of the nineteenth century saw the world of their adulthood as a product of unprecedentedly rapid and far-reaching historical change—so rapid and far-reaching that the world into which their fathers had been born seemed a radically different one. There was a strong tendency to telescope change into polarity: "it was only yesterday, but what a gulf between now and then." "Now," as Thackeray put it, was the era of railroads; "then" was the era of "stage coaches, . . . riding horses, pack-horses, highway-men, knights in armour, Norman invaders, Roman legions, Druids, Ancient Britons painted blue, and so forth"—two millennia of life within the British isles thus compressed into a single image of the "old world" before the "age of steam."⁴⁸

As their intellectual heirs, we share this polarizing tendency: back before the Industrial Revolution, or the "great transformation," lies "traditional society," or "the world we have lost." Many of the social theoretical tropes that still shape our understanding of the emergence of the modern world are in fact part of this inheritance—despite the fact that several major episodes of critical reexamination have long since called into question their simple polarity. And yet granting that in the historical world polarity is never simple, it may nevertheless be heuristically fruitful to sketch in some of the characteristics of Thackeray's "then" before the age of steam.⁴⁹

To begin with, we must accept its temporal indeterminacy. The disappearance of "the world we have lost" was both a revolution and an encroachment. Although the transformation of traditional England had begun early in the eighteenth century, the generation born in the 1820s and 1830s would still have been able to experience many features of the older world autobiographically as well as historically. At the same time, because they came of age at a late stage in the process, when the more

traumatic accompaniments had begun to recede into the background, the evolutionary generation experienced the change not so much as a wrenching asunder but as a transformation accomplished.⁵⁰

Whether located in the memories of their fathers or in the further reaches of contemporary Britain, the "old world" was an overwhelmingly rural one. When the first British census was taken in 1801, two-thirds of the population still lived in the countryside, and as late as 1851, when the Industrial Revolution was accomplished, agriculture was still the largest sector of the work force. As a rural world, the "old world" was closely tied to the processes and rhythms of nature. Despite the quickening pace of technological progress, mankind's power over nature was still for the most part manifest directly through the activity of the human hand, wielding tools of a relatively simple character. The "agrarian revolution" of the late eighteenth century was more a matter of the enclosure of open fields and the introduction of new crops and farming practices than of agricultural machinery, and agricultural work remained mostly manual and very labor-intensive until at least 1850.⁵¹

Because movement over land was restricted by the power of the human or animal leg, the "old world" was a very slow-moving and localized one. While there was in fact considerable migration, and the rural hinterland was linked through a network of minor market centers to the vast metropolis which was the arena of national public life, most inhabitants spent their lives in face-to-face village communities the size of those characteristically studied by modern anthropologists. "Everything physical was on the human scale," and "everything temporal was tied to the human life-span"—which, for the large bulk of the population, was short enough to make mortality an ever present preoccupation, and the continuity of social structure somewhat problematic. As the one large-scale institution regularly impinging on the day-to-day lives of a population of literal Christian believers, the Church played a critical role in maintaining authority relations in a society where "stable poverty" was the resigned expectation of most.⁵²

The primary threads of the social tapestry, however, were familial: people rarely found themselves in groups larger than family groups, which were the basic units of economic activity and social structure. The sphere of individual agency was limited by family status, and for most people was subsumed in that of someone to whom they stood in a relation of dependence. In a world of great disparities in wealth and power, the most important families (enlarged by earlier marriage and the presence of dependent servants) were those of the country gentry, whose houses were the visible manifestation of the social continuity provided by the inheritance of landed property.⁵³

Due to the larger size of landed families and the principle of primogeniture, the not inconsiderable social mobility was more likely to be

downward than up. The finely graded hierarchy of status was broken by one major horizontal discontinuity, above which stood the "gentleman"—who in a society with few labor-saving devices was able to delegate to others the necessity of working with his hands. Insofar as class may be said to have existed, it was the single class of those whose wealth, status, literacy, and family position enabled them to participate actively in the national political sphere—a group dominated by the titled aristocracy. Below that ruling class, the major social linkages were vertical rather than horizontal, and the patriarchal principles governing intrafamilial life were extended by analogy upward toward the top. Power flowed downward and outward through family connections and ties of patronage until it touched ground among the illiterate laboring poor in each local village community at the base of the multiplex social pyramid; and from the bottom, deference flowed back up.⁵⁴

Alternatively, deference may be viewed as part of a balanced reciprocity of customary relationships going back to the medieval period, in which the social cohesion of village communities was reinforced at critical moments in the calendric cycle by raucous rituals of status reversal and exactions of largesse by bands of laboring poor perambulating the parish. Buttressed by a rich fund of oral tradition, embellished by drink, licentiousness, rough play, and blood sports, the "vulgar and provincial customs, ceremonies, and superstitions" of village community culture filled the pages of Brand's *Popular Antiquities*, providing a continuing "primitive" base point for the "civilizing" processes that were transforming them.⁵⁵

Although the patriarchal principles of this Filmerian rural world continued to be strongly manifest even into the nineteenth century, they had long since been countered—and corrupted—by the Lockean forces of possessive individualism. Even in its heyday, the patriarchal "world we have lost" in Britain differed in important respects from preindustrial society in other areas of Europe, where feudalism was still a living reality and status was more rigidly determined by birth. Although the word "peasant" continued to be used, the feudal category it designated had by the eighteenth century largely been "replaced by the new capitalist relationships of landlord, tenant, and laborer"—save at the Celtic fringe, where the rural population was "half immersed in tribalism, dominated by near-feudal or alien landlords." The "middle ranks" of the English social hierarchy were larger in number, had greater freedom of occupational choice, were generally better off, and enjoyed some possibility of transforming the fruits of their labor into higher status. Just as there was no English national peasant costume, there was no English word for "bourgeoisie," perhaps because the possibility existed for the richer tradesmen of the towns to transform themselves into country gentlemen through the acquisition of land. And at the top of the hier-

archy, among the single class privileged to participate in the national public sphere where Lockean political principles were given practical manifestation after the Glorious Revolution, Lockean economic principles were ever more powerfully active: favored by the "absolute, categorical, unconditional" concept of property, seeking "their own profit by all the means which their special position had made available to them," the owners of landed property created the "climate and conditions in which a spontaneous industrial revolution could take place."⁵⁶

Like Buckle, many Victorians looked back on that revolution as a transformation of the relation of mankind to nature. Since the mid-eighteenth century, the ease and speed of movement through nature had been greatly facilitated by the improvement of roads, the construction of canals, and the advent of the railroad. The efficacy of human labor in reworking natural products into human ones had been vastly multiplied by the steam engine and the new machinery it powered, with consequent changes in the locus, organization, and scale of productive activity: the domestic system, in which the craftsman's household members were the unit of production, had gradually given way to the factory system, with its "scores or even hundreds of highly specialized operatives and £40-£50 of fixed capital per worker." In this context, the numbers and distribution of human beings within the natural world had changed dramatically. The first censuses made it clear that, contrary to the fears of earlier depopulation theorists, the population of England and Wales was rising rapidly; and although the early stages of the Industrial Revolution took place in the countryside, each successive census confirmed the rapid increase in the number and size of towns and cities, and in their relative proportion of the total population.⁵⁷

Just as the transformation involved a redistribution of population in space, so also did it involve a redefinition of the traditional social structure and the emergence of self-conscious class groupings characterized by "horizontal solidarity" and "vertical antagonism." The process has been described both as an "abdication on the part of the governors" and an "alienation of the middle and lower ranks." Committed to the pursuit of profit, the landed elite were less willing "to pay the price of paternal protection in return for filial obedience." In the aftermath of the anti-Jacobin reaction of the 1790s, they passed Combination Acts designed to render organized popular resistance ineffective, and in the repressive atmosphere of the wars of the French Revolution proceeded to the systematic dismantling of centuries-old legislation protecting wages and conditions of work. Frustrated in efforts to sustain the traditional paternal system or to resist by force the new machinery of industrialization, workers in rapidly transforming traditional crafts turned in the early postwar period to massive radical agitation for parliamentary reform. Provoked by the wartime restrictions on trade and the pas-

sage of Corn Laws which protected the rents of landowners at their expense, and responding to the economic and political writings of Benthamite philosophical radicals, commercial and entrepreneurial groups also moved toward collective assertiveness in the cause of parliamentary reform. Although the shift from the plural to the singular in "the language of class" had only begun, the heightened sense of opposition between the middle and the working classes was confirmed by the rejection of manhood for propertied suffrage in the resolution of the Reform Bill crisis of 1831-1832. The gentry long continued to dominate the political life of the countryside, and the major positions of national power continued through most of the Victorian era to be held by members of the aristocracy. But the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1848 symbolized the fact that aristocratic rule was now, so far as the middle classes were concerned, consensual rather than prescriptive, and that the entrepreneurial ideal of free trade and individual competition had become the dominant cultural ideology.⁵⁸

The birth of class did not signal the end of hierarchy, of paternalist ideology, or of the validation of social status by traditional criteria. But the efficacy of the patriarchal principles of patronage and dependency was greatly attenuated, and the sphere of effective independent agency, both individual and collective, was considerably broadened—although to varying degrees for different groups. Serving both as the midwife and the governess of class, sectarian religion simultaneously reinforced and brought under control the leveling ideology of the age of democratic revolution. Undermining the dependency which in traditional society had been buttressed by the established church, affirming the possibility of universal salvation by the assertion of free individual will and diligent good works, Methodism provided models of effective individual agency and class organization—at the same time that it contributed to industrial discipline and helped to restrain class violence. If by 1850 the revolutionary impulse among the working class had been defused, the spirit of independent agency (domesticated by respectability) remained strong among the labor aristocracy of the craft unions. And for the middle-class groups who reaped the economic benefits of *laissez-faire* and the political benefits of parliamentary reform, the sphere of effective independent agency, individual as well as collective, was greatly enlarged. By the energetic exercise of their own abilities, enough of them were able to climb the ladder of social status to give substantial reality to the mythology of the "self-made man"—and to enable some among their offspring to join an emerging "intellectual aristocracy."⁵⁹

However, for those who remained at the bottom, and who could not yet be reassured by the retrospective optimism of many modern historiographers, the actual experience of economic and social transformation was often very grim indeed. Artisans or domestic workers who languished in declining crafts, and whose wives and children were

forced to adjust to the mechanical work rhythms of the factory—from which traditional interspersing elements of play had been eliminated—experienced the change rather as a loss than as a gain of independence. Villagers whose traditional right to glean had been preempted by the landlord's pigs, or whose common fields were included in the thousands of Enclosure Acts passed between 1760 and 1820—and some of whom participated in the incendiaryism of the Swing Riots in 1831—did not see themselves as the beneficiaries of "agricultural improvement." Laboring poor excluded from the benefits of outdoor relief or paupers who deliberately committed offences that caused their removal from the workhouse to the gaol may have questioned the ideology of "independence" that motivated the Poor Law reform of 1834. Poverty-stricken immigrants from the English or Irish countryside who packed the hellish slums of the new industrial towns—many of whom had lost the consolations of religion without enjoying the spiritual uplift of radical working-class culture—might well have questioned the benefits of their liberation from the traditional ties of family and community.⁶⁰

From the perspective of contemporary middle-class observers, the primitivism at the bottom of the social scale now had a dual character. On the one hand, there was the rural primitivism of the preindustrial world, marginalized in England and still flourishing on the Celtic fringe; on the other, there was the urban primitivism of preindustrial London, metastasizing in every industrial town and city. The first, which was to be the subject matter of the science of folklore, could still be looked at through an elegiac filter of "soft" primitivism, the more so as the blood sports of the villages were outlawed and the raucous visitations of Plough Monday were transformed into Plough Sunday services. But there were no traces of "Merrie England" to be found in the new city slums, which provided the subject matter of the urban reformer's science of social statistics. They remained, even in the process of reformation, a disturbing and alien phenomenon—so far removed from the amenities and the morality of civilized life that many observers, including Friedrich Engels and Henry Mayhew, were impelled to use racial analogies to capture the sense of difference. Thus for Engels the working classes were "a race apart"—physically degenerate, robbed of all humanity, reduced morally and intellectually to near bestial condition, not only by economic exploitation, but by competition and association with the coarse, volatile, dissolute, drunken, improvident Irish, who slept with their pigs in the stinking slums of Manchester. And for Mayhew, the street folk of London were a "nomad race" without "the least faculty of prevision," flouting the middle-class ethic of sexual restraint and hard work, reduced to the terrible alternation of "starvation and surfeit."⁶¹

The survival of such "savagery" in a world of unprecedented progress was one of the more disturbing of the cultural paradoxes experi-

enced by thoughtful members of the Victorian middle classes. For the successful middle-class entrepreneur, contemplating the purchase of a landed estate that might in time validate his own rise in terms of the traditional status system, the paradox might be dissolved in self-congratulatory hypocrisy. But judged in terms of the more radical attitudes of his own upward striving youth, or from the perspective of offspring who felt freer to question some of the motivating values of a world they had not made, the paradox was not so easily resolved.⁶² Retrospectively, however, we may suggest several ways by which its gnawing force was diminished: by attempts to improve the condition of those at the bottom of the social scale; by efforts to control the threat that it presented to the emerging industrial order; by attempts to keep the reality or the knowledge of it at a distance; and by efforts to interpret it in ways that gave it a less threatening meaning.

By the time of the Crystal Palace, a number of reform initiatives had begun to ameliorate some of the more appalling aspects of the transformation. Some of these—like the temperance movement—sought the moral reformation of the individuals whose lives had been wrenched by social change. Others sought by legislation or administrative measures to improve the conditions in which their lives must now be led. Thus a series of Factory Acts shortened the working hours first of children, then of women, and finally of all workers to sixty hours; a series of acts relating to public health began to cope with some of the more blatant problems of urban sanitation. But if the efforts of temperance advocates and factory and sanitation reformers may be seen as early assertions of the necessity of governmental intervention in the processes of *laissez-faire*, they probably had less ameliorative effect upon the living conditions of the lower classes than the threefold rise in real wages between 1800 and 1850.⁶³

Early Victorians were perhaps more successful in policing the lower classes than in uplifting them. Although the new social order had been shaken by episodes of actual or threatened collective violence in the first decades after the Napoleonic wars, the passing of this dangerous phase of transformation was symbolized by the peaceful outcome of the last great Chartist demonstration of April 1848, when its leaders yielded to the warnings of the London Metropolitan Police that the procession should not march across the bridge from Kensington Common to Westminster. Since the formation of the London "peelers" in 1829, the new police had been extended to many provincial towns after the Municipal Reform Act of 1835; in the same period rural property and person were also made more secure with the establishment of professional constabularies, which in 1856 were made compulsory throughout the nation. By that time, social order seemed assured, and even the delinquents who sallied forth from urban "rookeries" were "becoming less blatant

in their approach to those from whom they begged and stole." Walking the streets with less fear of molestation, middle-class citizens could also congratulate themselves that the treatment of criminals was more humane: gaols had been reformed (though prisoners inside them still walked treadmills); capital crimes had been reduced from 200 in 1808 to only 4 in 1861, and after 1868 even these were no longer made the occasion of public "hanging matches."⁶⁴

But if a great distance had been traveled since 1780 toward "the organization of a civilized social life," the distance between the upper and the lower reaches of the social scale had not narrowed but widened in that period. Despite the increase in real wages, the Industrial Revolution had in fact made the distribution of income among different social groups considerably more unequal. And there are indications that the distance of day-to-day social relations had also increased as the vertical links of patriarchal hierarchy were replaced by the horizontal lines of class. The day had passed when a lady shared a bed with her servant at an inn, and would soon also pass when agricultural laborers joined the well-to-do farmer's table for Harvest Home. The separation of the growing numbers of domestic servants from the classes that employed them was one of the governing principles of the domestic architecture of the Victorian upper classes. Similarly, the segregation of social classes into different urban and suburban residential areas helped to keep the slum world out of sight and mind—so that the facts of Chadwick's Sanitary Report of 1842 could seem as strange to persons of the wealthier classes "as if they related to foreigners or the natives of an unknown country."⁶⁵

Insofar as it could not be reformed, controlled, or distanced, the savage remnant of the Industrial Revolution could be reinterpreted. Accepting the Malthusian premise that population growth was antithetical to civilization, it was possible to reread the processes of economic change, social transformation, and material progress in moral terms and thereby not only to ease the burden of upper-class responsibility, but to shift it to the lower orders themselves. Nor was such ideologizing accomplished without reference to historical reality, as it has been subsequently interpreted: the role of demographic factors in the Industrial Revolution, and the fact that it was accompanied by a revolution in morals, are accepted commonplaces of modern British historiography.⁶⁶

In 1780, the moral model of the socially dominant group was the aristocratic ideal of the gentleman. Free by birth, blood, and inherited landed wealth from the necessity of manual labor or contamination by the money-grubbing pursuits of commerce, free also to enjoy the private vices of gambling, drunkenness, and sexual indulgence, the gentleman was governed by a paramilitary code of honor which required any insult from another gentleman to be defended in a duel—which half the prime

ministers of the transitional period actually fought at some point in their lives. The aristocratic ideal of the gentleman was not (nor was it intended to be) shared by all social ranks; the moral revolution was an attempt to generalize to the rest of society a transmuted version of the ascetic puritan work ethic that had previously been dominant only among sectors of the middle ranks. Evangelicals undermined the aristocratic ideal from within, convincing many among the upper ranks that the defense of property was better accomplished by moral regeneration than by force; dissenters and secular evangelical utilitarians "worked together to reinforce the moral superiority of the middle class and to impose its puritanism on the rest of society."⁶⁷

By 1850, the attempt had been largely successful. Although the slaughter of game still remained a major preoccupation of the landed gentry, and the 1830s and 1840s had seen a revival of chivalric forms, dueling had been banished from the repertoire of gentlemanly behavior. It was now asserted by such middle-class spokesmen as Samuel Smiles that the "true gentleman," like the "self-made man," would be "honest, truthful, upright, polite, temperate, courageous, self-respecting, and self-helping." In fact, of course, the slowly changing criteria of gentlemanly status had not simply collapsed into those of respectability; nevertheless, it was by this time generally accepted that gentlemen, like every other social group, ought to conform to the norms of respectable behavior.⁶⁸

Although "continent" was not among the adjectives of Smiles' enumeration, it has been suggestively argued that by the time he wrote the virtue of sexual continence had been integrated into the normative standard of respectable behavior—not simply as one more in a list, but in a way that drew together the realms of sexuality and political economy. In Victorian economic ideology, Homo Economicus was governed by opposing motives: the desire for wealth, comfort, and status on the one hand, and the aversion for labor and the desire for indulgence on the other. Save for those with inherited wealth, the two sets of motives were in conflict: in the respectable middle-class man, the tension was resolved by a prudent self-denying industry in the present in the hope of future reward; among those sectors of the lower classes who had not yet achieved respectability, the tension was resolved in favor of present self-indulgence. Similarly, in Victorian sexual ideology, Homo Sexualis was in tension between the motives of immediate gratification and sublimation of the sexual appetite; and here, too, there was a respectable middle-class and a lower-class resolution. The economic and the sexual models were in fact linked in contemporary physiological theory, which saw the amount of vital force as fixed: if one "spent" it on sex, one could not direct it to work. Nor were these virtues natural; rather, they were the result of rigorous self-discipline of opposing instinctual ten-

dencies, which alone enable men (in John Stuart Mill's words) to sacrifice "a present desire to a distant object." Large groups of humankind—among whom Mill instanced both savages and "nearly the whole of the poorer classes," as well as by implication the unreformed aristocracy—were by defective training and life experience unable to exercise such foresight.⁶⁹

The respectable middle-class ideology of economic sexuality did not of course emerge full-blown in the 1850s. Well before Victoria assumed the throne, Victorian sexual morality was already a powerful cultural force; and the close relationship of sexuality and economics was a central assumption of Malthus' *Principle of Population*, the book which more than any other defined the terms of social discourse in Britain for the next half century. It was Malthus' principle of population that made political economy the "dismal science"; and it was a central principle of that science that the pressure of excessive numbers against the means of subsistence was the major cause of poverty. But if Malthusianism "succeeded in de-moralizing political economy," it did not thus "demoralize" the issue of poverty. As a social phenomenon poverty might be viewed as a corollary of the "laws of nature," but individuals among the poor could always choose to exercise "moral restraint"; and if they did not, society could endeavor to enforce it upon them—as the reformed Poor Law of 1834 attempted to do. Those who did not submit sexual impulse to the governance of utilitarian economic motive could thus be seen as choosing to be poor; and even those who, like Mill, would not have made that judgment, nevertheless saw the poor as possessed of a different (and deficient) moral character. Like Lubbock's savages, they were slaves to their own wants and passions; constantly staring hunger in the face, because, in the word of Samuel Smiles, they could not sacrifice "present gratification for a future good."⁷⁰

But if the "lesson of self-denial" was "one of the last that is learnt," the spread of respectability among the working classes held forth the prospect that it might yet be learned—and the paradox of surviving savagery thus eventually eliminated. In the meantime, those who had learned the lesson might enjoy the rewards of rational self-improvement, social mobility, and unprecedented progress in civilization—which were, in cumulative effect, ideological equivalents. Just as self-denial, industry, continence, and foresight were the means of individual upward mobility, so were they the mechanisms of social progress. Civilization—as Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* made abundantly clear—was self-improvement writ large.⁷¹

Although the lives of the major figures of sociocultural evolutionism reflect the social processes of the Industrial Revolution in rather different ways, the theme of middle-class social mobility is a recurrent one. McLennan's career was one of hard fought and frustrated upward striv-

ing. Asking in 1870 for Lubbock's help in obtaining a position Gladstone had at his disposal as Prime Minister, McLennan noted that he had "never had a farthing" he had not earned "by my own exertions in the open struggle for life"—contrasting his own active efforts on behalf of the Liberal party with the "family influence" of his rival, who had an inherited annual income of £600. Although Lubbock at that time was himself already a baronet, the theme of social mobility, transposed into a higher key, is also evident in his career. Assuring Lubbock that the family were not of cockney origin—as his parliamentary opponent had apparently maintained in 1865—his banker father suggested, somewhat uncertainly, that they belonged "to the race of tenant farmers; or yeoman, or a mixture of both." Lubbock eventually reduced this ancestral indeterminacy by tracing his lineage back four centuries to Robert Lobuk, and ended his life as Lord Avebury, proud possessor of a castle in Kent. So also Tylor: as the son of an industrial entrepreneur, he was able to pursue his intellectual interests living as a country gentleman in Somerset; he ended his career with a knighthood, and a personal professorship at Oxford, which his early Quaker beliefs would have barred him from entering.⁷²

Although the connections are less striking than in the case of the specific institutions of marriage and religion, the writings of these three men also reflect at critical points the experience of social change symbolized by their own social mobility. Thus the last sentence of Lubbock's *Origin of Civilisation* looked forward to a day when "the blessings of civilisation" would be extended not only to savages in other countries, but to "countrymen of our own living, in our very midst, a life worse than that of a savage." But the connection exists at a deeper level than perorational exhortation. That Tylor had in mind the phenomenon of social mobility in thinking about human progress is evident from a fragment preserved in his papers. Everyone knew "how families go up and down in the world": "A family may now be poor and ignorant either because the parents were once still lower and have not risen much, or on the contrary because the parents may once have been better off, and the household may have fallen through misfortune or ill-conduct." Although "the general result is a good deal the same in both cases, on looking closely one may make out what is the true history, for the appearance and ways of people who have fought their way up in the world do not show the symptoms of former prosperity. . . ." Perhaps because in this instance "survivals" might have documented decline as well as progress, the passage broke off; more generally in Tylor's work, that concept resonates to the experience of progressive social change. Although survivals like "the practice of salutation upon sneezing" might exist in the highest levels of civilized society, it was among the lower orders, especially in the countryside, that they are more likely to be

found—as the virtual synonymy of "survival" and "superstition" suggests.⁷³

The heuristic value of contemporary social experience was most systematically stated, however, by McLennan, who suggested that "in a progressive community all the sections do not advance *pari passu*, so that we may see in the lower some of the phases through which the more advanced have passed." Echoing Mayhew, he suggested that in London, the very center of "arts, sciences and intelligence," one could find "predatory bands, leading the life of the lowest nomads," as well as illustrations of every phase of the progress of the family, "from the lowest incestuous combinations of kindred to the highest group based on solemn monogamous marriage." And what was true of the large towns generally was still truer of the nation at large. In Cornwall and Devonshire "we discover remains of pre-Christian customs and superstitions, as well as modes of life of striking rudeness"; in the Highlands of Scotland "tribal and clan ties were till very lately in full force." Far from being merely folkloric curiosities, such "inequalities of development" were essential aids "in the investigation of the unrecorded history of a people." And because "inequalities of development" would be "indefinitely more numerous and striking for the totality of races of men than for any one of them," it was possible that "every conceivable phase of progress can be studied as somewhere observed and recorded," and that these could be shown "to shade into one another by gentle gradations," so that "a clear and decided outline of the progress may be made from the rudest phase to the highest." Extrapolating from the lived, observed, or reported experience of recent life in Britain, McLennan was able to derive (or to justify) a methodological principle which we may metaphorically reformulate in the language of Haeckel's "biogenetic law": phylogeny—the race-differentiated progress of the human species over the last hundred millennia—recapitulated ontogeny—the class-differentiated progress of British civilization over the last hundred years.⁷⁴

Reason, Instinct, and the Problem of Moral Progress

Moving to a frankly metaphoric level of historical interpretation, we may perhaps bring together the philosopher savage and the bestial savage by reconsidering their dominant underlying psychological characteristics—reason and instinct—in relation to the movement from eighteenth-century developmentalism to Victorian sociocultural evolutionism. Among the many shared assumptions that link these two intellectual viewpoints, one of the more striking is of course a great confidence in the power of human reason—including, especially in the nineteenth-

century version, the power to understand and control the forces of external nature. From this point of view, the Industrial Revolution may be regarded as the practical implementation of the eighteenth-century belief in human rationality, and nineteenth-century sociocultural evolutionism was a reformulation, in terms appropriate to the later British utilitarian tradition, of eighteenth-century accounts of the progress of the human mind. At every level, human beings tried to understand and control the world around themselves and adapt their behavior to it. Progress in positive knowledge—and therefore in effective rationality—consisted in a closer coordination of the external world and internal mental representations of it, largely by the elimination of reasoning that was either erroneously founded or no longer adaptive.

Among the various discontinuities that separate nineteenth-century evolutionary progressivism from its eighteenth-century precursors, none was more powerfully disjunctive than that introduced by Thomas Malthus. Letting loose the animal force of instinct into the orderly world of rational progress, Malthus in effect called into question the power of human rationality to control those forces of nature that were internal to humankind itself: thus agricultural production (the fruit of human knowledge) increased only by orderly arithmetic steps, while population (the fruit of human sexual instinct) increased by geometric leaps and bounds. The Malthusian savage lived in a Hobbesian world in which human rationality was constantly at the mercy of sexual instinct; and in the natural course of things the inherent tension between human reason and human biology was reducible only by continuous suffering or recurrent disaster.⁷⁵

From this point of view, the moral revolution—although in origin antedating Malthus—was a means by which the natural course of history could be reclaimed for optimistic rationality. Thus it was that Malthus' second edition allowed the possibility that constant suffering and periodic disaster could be averted by the encouragement and diffusion of "moral restraint"—which differed from merely "prudential restraint" in that it did not simply delay marriage "from prudential motives, [but did so] with a conduct strictly moral during the period of this restraint." Whether merely prudential or fully moral, such restraint implied a model of both individual and racial development: like self-improvement, progress consisted not simply in a growth in reason, but in a repression of sexual instinct. And the two were in fact linked, not merely insofar as the repression of sexual instinct might be rationally motivated, but in the more profound sense that progress in reason would always be in jeopardy without a parallel progress in morals. Material progress and spiritual progress were opposite sides of a coin, insofar as the control of external nature depended on the control of nature within.⁷⁶

Without some resolution of the Malthusian dilemma, the revival of developmentalism in the form of sociocultural evolutionism would have

been difficult indeed—although Lubbock in fact dealt with the matter simply by asserting that "under civilisation, the means of subsistence have increased, even more rapidly than the population." In the case of McLennan, the resolution eventually took the form of a starkly amoral utilitarianism: in a posthumously published essay, he suggested that female infanticide, to reduce the pressure of population upon food, was "the most important [step] that was ever taken in the history of mankind"—the first fruit, as it were, of foresighted human reason risen beyond the stage of blind animal instinct. With its resonance of biblical degenerationism and its premonition of Freud, the idea that civilization had originated in crime was not easily compatible with mid-Victorian evolutionary optimism; and in 1852 Herbert Spencer had in fact offered a solution to the Malthusian dilemma more congenial to the morality of Victorian respectability.⁷⁷

As he turned from the still programmatic *Social Statics* toward the elaboration of his cosmic evolutionary scheme, one of Spencer's first self-imposed intellectual tasks had been to put the Malthusian barrier to developmental optimism permanently behind him. Although he had planned to write a book on the topic, his alternative "Theory of Population Deduced from the General Law of Animal Fertility" was published as an article in the *Westminster Review*. In it, Spencer suggested that there were two forces that preserved the life of any organic form—one tending to the maintenance of individual life and the other to its reproduction. Since organic tissue and vital force used for one purpose could not be used for the other, these forces were of necessity inversely correlated. Insisting that there was a systematic opposition between individuation and reproduction in the organic world, Spencer argued that the former was tied directly to the increasing complexity of the nervous system. Although the pressure of population had previously been a constantly stimulating factor in the evolution of life forms, the time would come when the evolution of the nervous system would make such pressure unnecessary. Already in man the opposition of fertility and intellect could be demonstrated in the enlargement of human crania evident between the Australian aborigines and Englishmen. And if the Irish potato famine was evidence that the pressure of fertility still operated in modern life, Spencer nevertheless looked forward to a day when the discipline of labor to gain a living would have produced a race in which each pair would have only two children to reproduce themselves, and the pressure of population would disappear entirely.⁷⁸

That Spencer may have been raising the respectable Victorian ideology of economic sexuality to the level of biological determinism is suggested by the fact that at the time he began work on this article he was actively contemplating the place of marriage in his own life. Giving numerical values to the advantages of emigrating to New Zealand against those of remaining in England, he added 100 points for "marriage" to

the winning side of emigration. He later argued this as evidence that "a state of celibacy was far from being my ideal"; but at the time he chose instead to remain in England and work out the problem of the inverse correlation of reproductivity and intellect. Although Spencer granted that the selection incident to Malthusian disaster would have played a role in the process, a more significant guarantor of progress was the inheritance of acquired characteristics, which in his fully developed schema was the primary mechanism of the continuing evolution of the human brain. On this basis, the opposition between biology and reason could eventually be completely overcome, since in the Spencerian view, the results of human rationality could over time be incorporated into the organic structure of the human brain. The greater foresight and ability to delay gratification that civilized men showed relative to savages was not merely a cultural achievement, but was wired into their more highly evolved nervous systems.⁷⁹

By the time the major works of sociocultural evolutionism were produced, the issue of moral progress, long simmering in the frictional heat of pre-Darwinian intellectual movements, had again bubbled up to demand attention. Malthusian assumption—not in the reassuring guise of "moral restraint," but once again in the raw form of the "preventive check"—had been transformed into the *primum mobile* of evolutionary change: "natural selection." And natural selection threatened to take all ethical meaning out of temporal process, not simply by postulating evolutionary change independent of God's direction, but also by premising it implicitly on vice rather than virtue. For in traditional moral terms, the implicit Darwinian injunction to "multiply, vary, let the strongest live, and the weakest die" could be interpreted as an exaltation of sexual indulgence, avarice, and aggression—a possibility of which Darwin may have had a premonition when, in an early evolutionary notebook, he commented on the instinctual origin of mankind's "evil passions": "the Devil under form of Baboon is our grandfather!"⁸⁰

A generation later, Victorian anthropologists were willing to contemplate the possibility that the world as they knew it was the result of purely natural processes, and even to join in extending the revolt against patriarchal authority to the cosmos as a whole. But the weakening of their religious belief had not been accompanied by a loss of moral commitment. Like some other thinkers in the utilitarian tradition, they had felt the relativizing impact of "a more profound reading of history, coming to a large extent from German romanticism," and been forced by the rapid accumulation of information on non-European peoples to consider why it was that different groups of mankind found pleasure and pain in very different things. But granted that moral values varied in time and place—perhaps, in Darwinian terms, were "adapted" to different environmental situations—this could not mean that there was no

standard by which they might be evaluated. Just as the "dismal science" of political economy required the consolation of "moral restraint" to be ideologically palatable to an optimistic industrializing society, so did evolutionary science—which some have seen as an ideologization of Victorian economic processes—require the cosmic consolation of moral progress. If the devil in form of baboon was to be our grandfather, then the moral guides and goals that had once been provided by the Creator had to find some evolutionary derivation and justification. The requirement was not simply imposed from without by the defenders of supernatural creation, who demanded an alternative theory for the origin of man's spiritual culture; it was also imposed from within, by the need evolutionists themselves felt for reassurance that processes whose origin was purely natural would somehow lead to a moral outcome.⁸¹

So it was that, unlike Buckle (who was pre-Darwinian), the sociocultural evolutionary writers were all concerned to argue the reality of moral as well as material progress. Thus McLennan, noting that it was "a favourite idea of some that man's progress has been material merely," insisted that "the moral sentiments of men can be seen improving with the domestic institutions." From this point of view, *Primitive Marriage* may be regarded as an account of the early moral evolution of humankind. Although Lubbock suggested that his "preconceived ideas [had] led him to doubt that [any human race could be] almost entirely wanted in moral feeling," his study of savagery had forced him to conclude that "Man has, perhaps, made more progress in moral than in either material or intellectual advancement." And while he admitted that there was no "atrocious" crime or vice recorded by a traveler that "might not be paralleled in Europe," he argued that what was punished as criminal behavior in civilized society was often—like parricide in Fiji—merely customary behavior among savages.⁸²

Tylor, too, accepted the equation of civilized crime and savage custom: although "the ideal savage of the 18th century might be held up as a living reproof to vicious and frivolous London," in "sober fact, a Londoner who should attempt to lead the atrocious life which the real savage may lead with impunity and even respect, would be a criminal only allowed to follow his savage models during his short intervals out of gaol." And with Lubbock, he felt that the "oft-repeated comparison of savages to children" might be applied "as fairly to their moral as to their intellectual condition." Thus it was that even "the better savage life" was always "in but unstable equilibrium, liable to be easily upset by a touch of distress, temptation, or violence," and to become "the worse savage life, which we know by so many dismal and hideous examples."⁸³

But in Tylor the relativist impulse was stronger than in Lubbock. He was willing to admit moral loss as well as gain with the progress of

civilization. Thus the virtues of courage, honesty, and generosity might suffer, "at least for a time, by the development of a sense of value of life and property." And when, in response to Darwin's urging, Tylor looked more systematically at the problem of moral evolution, he took as a basic principle that the difference between lower and higher morality was less a reflection of abstract ethical ideas than of "unlike conditions of life." Morality was largely a matter of conforming to the customs of the society a person belonged to, and if anything, savages were more custom-bound than civilized men. Under favorable conditions, many of them had a "fair idea of virtue," and even realized it in ways that would put a "more cultured nation" to shame. Nonetheless, Tylor felt that a general survey showed that the lower the culture, the stronger the selfish and malevolent as opposed to the unselfish and benevolent impulses. Even if each culture grade should be judged by its own standard, the changes of moral standards from age to age were no mere shifting, but represented a progress in morality. Furthermore, what had been unconscious evolution was now giving way to conscious development.⁸⁴

Herbert Spencer, the first and the most systematic of the evolutionary moralists, put the matter most succinctly in 1876, in discussing the sphere in which morality was most centrally at issue. There was both "a relative and an absolute standard by which to estimate domestic institutions in each stage of social progress." Judging them relatively, "by their adaptations to the accompanying social requirements," we might regard arrangements that we found "repugnant" as "needful in their times and places." But judging them absolutely, "in relation to the most developed types of life, individual and national," we might still "find good reasons for reprobating them." Although Spencer did not specify these "most developed types," there could be little doubt which they might be; sharing his ethnocentric identification, Spencer's readers would surely agree with his suggestion that a "preliminary survey reveals the fact that the domestic relations which are the highest as ethically considered, are also the highest as considered both biologically and sociologically."⁸⁵

Although Spencer's immediate intellectual historical context differed from that of Lubbock, McLennan, and Tylor in terms of their respective relationships to the Darwinian revolution, there are certain critical points at which he may be regarded as their spokesman. Coming from within the same philosophical tradition, and dealing with evolution from a more comprehensive point of view, he sometimes explicitly and systematically articulated positions not fully stated or only implicit in their work. Just as his Lamarckian evolutionary associationism provided a means to reconcile the psychic unity of man with a hierarchical racialism, so did his insistence on both a proximate ethical relativism and an ultimate ethical absolutism help to resolve another (and related)

tension in sociocultural evolutionary thought. In each case differences were arrayed along an extended temporal scale, so as to preserve human unity while simultaneously insisting on racial hierarchy. Mankind was one, as John Burrow has suggested, "not because it was everywhere the same, but because the differences represented stages in the same process."⁸⁶

That process was both an intellectual and a moral evolution. Cast in the terms of Spencer's more systematic evolutionary theory, the picture he drew together in 1876 of "Primitive Man—Emotional" and "Primitive Man—Intellectual" may stand as a representation of its starting point. What Spencer offered under the former heading was in fact a picture of the moral character of primitive man—abstracted, as he suggested, from the variations to be found among existing "inferior races" as the result of their contrasting habitats, unlike modes of life, and differing forms of social discipline. The predominating trait was "impulsiveness"—the "sudden, or approximately-reflex, passing of a single passion into the conduct it prompts." Following necessarily from this was "improvidence"—the result of "desire go[ing] at once to gratification." Unable to conceive the future, thoughtlessly absorbed in the present, uncivilized man—like the "improvident Irishman"—was full of "childish mirthfulness." Intolerant of restraint, vain and vengeful, driven by a strong but irregular "philoprogenitiveness," his "moral nature" was best judged by his "habitual behavior to women"—which was "frequently brutal" and at best unsympathetic. In compensation for this otherwise erratic character, primitive man was "conservative in an extreme degree": "His simpler nervous system, sooner losing its plasticity, was still less able [than the common people of today] to take on a modified mode of action."⁸⁷

Just as the moral character of primitive man was premised on a direct, unmediated expression of internal passionate nature, so was the intellectual character of primitive man premised on a direct, unmediated apprehension of external nature. "Nearly everyone" who described savages testified to the "acute senses and quick perceptions of the uncivilized," to their powers of "active and minute observation," and to their "great skill in those actions depending on immediate guidance of perception." But in proportion as savage "mental energies go out in restless perception, they cannot go out in deliberate thought." The opposition of "perceptive activity" and "reflective activity" was further evidenced in their obsession with "meaningless details" and their imitativeness—the tendency to "ape" implying a "smaller departure from the brute type of mind." Unable to "see the likenesses which unite [phenomena] notwithstanding their unlikenesses," they were unable to rise "from the consciousness of individual objects to the consciousness of species," and quick to tire of any conversation that required "thought above the simplest." Having no general ideas, they had no "idea of a

causal relation"; unable to distinguish between the "natural and unnatural," they were victims of credulity incapable of "rational surprise." Because they lacked curiosity and constructive imagination, their inventions had arisen unobtrusively "without any distinct devising." Although developing rapidly, the savage intellect quickly reached its limit, and "presently stop[ped] short from inability to grasp the complex ideas readily grasped by European children." The savage had, in short, "the mind of a child with the passions of a man"—or, in terms of the present metaphorical opposition, the reason of a child and the instincts of a man (although not those of a civilized man, which would have been modified and constrained by reason).⁸⁸

Perhaps because his sociocultural evolutionism was explicitly and systematically part of a broader cosmic process, and therefore required a greater degree of continuity with the subhuman level, Spencer—unlike Tylor—did not portray primitive man in the first instance as an "ancient savage philosopher." Dissociating himself from "current ideas respecting the thoughts of the primitive man"—who was "commonly pictured as theorizing about surrounding appearances"—Spencer insisted that "in fact, the need for explanations of them does not occur to him." But as soon as primitive man started to evolve, he quickly took on the guise of the philosopher savage, whose "physical conceptions," at first "few," "vague," "inconsistent and confused" were nonetheless "rational" in "the conditions in which they occur." The primitive mind, like ours, proceeded by assimilating "states of consciousness" with "their likes in past experience"; but uncivilized men were led into error because their judgments of "likeness and unlikeness" were based on surface similarities rather than "essential characters." Because the savage's actual experiences of the mutations of the inorganic world showed repeated "transitions between the visible and the invisible," he was led inevitably, by "the laws of mental association," to primitive notions "of transmutation, of metamorphosis, of duality" which, articulated by an "unconscious hypothesis," were gradually systematized along essentially Tylorian lines—and then modified over time with "the advance in reasoning power."⁸⁹

Similarly, Spencer's formal theory of instinct was more complex than the metaphorical opposition of reason and instinct suggests. He in fact insisted that there was no sharp hiatus, but a gradual transition between instinctive and rational actions. His Lamarckian view of mental evolution facilitated a complex interweaving of the two. Thus there was a gradual incorporation of habitual experience into the instinctual structure of the brain, so that the "actions we call rational are, by long-continued repetition, rendered automatic or instinctive." His resolution of the conflict between intuitionism and empiricism involved a similar process, by which "those instinctive mental relations constituting our

ideas of Space and Time," although originally based in experience, had become "forms of intuition"—"elements of thought which it is impossible to get rid of."⁹⁰

But the transition between instinct and reason also worked in the opposite direction. Whenever "from increasing complexity and decreasing frequency, the automatic adjustment of inner to outer relations becomes uncertain or hesitating," the "actions called instinctive [could] pass gradually into actions called rational." In general, as the "instincts rise higher and higher, they come to include psychical changes that are less and less coherent"; compound reflex actions become "less decided" and ultimately "lose their distinctly automatic character." Thus, in the long run "that which we call Instinct must pass insensibly into something higher." Over evolutionary time, there was a constant increase in the "proportion of actions that take place with deliberation and consciousness, as well as an increase in the amount of deliberation and consciousness."⁹¹

In both the intellectual and the moral sphere, the law of mental development was "an adjustment of inner to outer relations that gradually extends in Space and Time, that becomes increasingly special and complex, and that has its elements more precisely co-ordinated and more completely integrated"—so that there was an ever closer "correspondence between changes in the organism and coexistences and sequences in the environment." But if the correspondence became closer, it also became less immediate and more indirect: "Mental evolution, both intellectual and emotional, may be measured by the degree of remoteness from primitive reflex action." At one extreme, there was the formation of "sudden irreversible conclusions on the slenderest evidence"; at the other, the formation of "deliberate and modifiable conclusions after much evidence has been collected." At one extreme, "the quick passage of simple emotions into the particular kinds of action they prompt"; at the other, the "comparatively-hesitating passage of compound emotions into kinds of conduct determined by the joint instigation of their components." At one extreme, the primitive, uncivilized man—still a step below Tylor's failed philosopher savage—responding directly and immediately to the stimuli of external environment and internal nature. At the other extreme, the middle-class Victorian philosopher of civilization, who—by giving systematic theoretical articulation to one of the central presuppositions of the ideology of his class—formulated an evolutionary proposition even more fundamental than "the survival of the fittest": that the repression of immediate impulsive response was the essential mechanism of evolutionary progress in both the intellectual and the moral sphere. By marking off those who were intellectually capable of conceiving the future consequences of their behavior, and who were morally capable of bringing instinctive impulse within the control

of this rational conception, this proposition provided the ultimate criterion of fitness. Those who were more able to control the forces of nature internal to themselves were also those more able to control the forces of nature that impinged upon them from outside. And because the results of such foresight were (whether by Darwinian selection or Lamarckian use-inheritance) built into the structure of the evolving human brain, both intellectual and moral progress were in fact given a biological guarantee—in a universe in which, for many, the Creator was no longer able to play the role of guarantor.⁹²

Stepping back from Spencer's specific evolutionary argument, we may thus see the opposition between the philosopher savage and the bestial savage as a representation of conflicting potentialities of human (cum animal) nature, gradually brought together in the course of evolution—as in fact the parallel movement from polytheism to monotheism and from polygamy to monogamy suggests. On the one hand, the progress of initially erring human reason, an ever more perfect correlation of internal representations and external nature, bringing the latter under ever-greater control; on the other, the progress of initially bestial human instinct, in which internal nature was brought under ever-greater rational control. Mankind, which was now to be understood as natural rather than divine in origin, was nonetheless subject to rational moral purpose; evolution, which linked us to brute creation, enabled us also to transcend it. Even without the assurance of God, it was still possible to envision the movement of history as a triumph of the spiritual over the material.

A Cosmic Genealogy for Middle-Class Civilization

One of the striking things about sociocultural evolutionary assumption is its metaphorical extendibility—a quality clearly related to its very great ideological adaptiveness. That extendibility is evident in analogies or equations of both process and status. On the one hand, there is the analogy/equation between the biological evolution of the human species, the civilization of humankind, and the education of the human individual—evident particularly in Herbert Spencer's writings on the latter topic. The three forms of development were not only analogous, but could also be viewed as sequentially cumulative—especially in the context of the implied or explicit assumption of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Other biological assumptions ("recapitulation," "degeneration" and "arrested development") facilitated analogizing up and down the developmental scale.⁹³

In the post-Darwinian milieu, certain biological writers elaborated more systematic deterministic frameworks for such analogizing. Thus,

the German biologist Ernst Haeckel's "biogenetic law" interpreted the ontogenetic development of the individual as a rapid "mechanical" recapitulation of the phylogenetic sequence of adult forms. But similar analogizing could be derived from pre-Darwinian biological traditions (German *naturphilosophie* or French transcendental morphology), and even from biologists quite critical of certain recapitulationist assumptions. Spencer's analogizing had its biological source in the work of Von Baer, who insisted that parallelism of embryological development did not imply the repetition of adult stages; but Spencer nevertheless had frequent recourse to the child/savage equation. And among most writers in the sociocultural evolutionary mode, such analogizing would seem to reflect simply an unexamined traditional tendency to equate different forms of "development," or to subsume them under a single metaphor of "growth," rather than any systematic set of biological assumptions.⁹⁴

Indeed, one suspects that the metaphorical extendibility of sociocultural evolutionism may have been more a matter of analogies of status than of process. Consider the social categories that were metaphorically equated—if not directly, then through their mutual likeness to savages, or departure from the civilized norm, or sharing of some "primitive" attribute. The equation might be only implicit, as in Tylor's suggestion that what was customary among savages would be criminal in London; or it might be more systematically elaborated, as in Spencer's suggestion that the intellectual traits of primitive man were especially evident in "women of the inferior ranks" of our own society—who "quickly form very positive beliefs"; whose thoughts, "full of personal experiences," lacked "truths of high generality"; who could never detach an "abstract conception" from a "concrete case"; who were "inexact" and "averse to precision"; and who went on "doing things in the ways they were taught, never imagining better methods, however obvious."⁹⁵ Although lower-class women and criminals might differ in many respects, they shared a similarity to "savages." The list of social categories thus equated was quite extensive: in addition to criminals, women, and children, it included peasants, rustics, laborers, beggars, paupers, madmen, and Irishmen—all of whom were at times likened to savages or to "primitive" man.

What they shared, with each other and with savages, were certain mental characteristics—characteristics that placed them at a lower point on the unitary scale of intellectual and moral development: governed more by impulse, deficient in foresight, they were in varying degrees unable to subordinate instinctual need to human rational control. But beyond this—and some might have said because of it—there were certain common factors in their social position. Along different lines—of domestic life (woman, child), of socioeconomic status (laborer, peasant, pauper), of deviancy (criminal, madman), and of "race" (Celtic Irish-

man, black savage)—they all stood in a subordinate hierarchical relationship to those who dominated the economic life, who shared the political power, or who most actively articulated the cultural ideology of mid-Victorian Britain. Many of these relationships were not simply hierarchical, but exploitative as well, in the sense that the life possibilities of a single individual higher up were sustained by the labor of a number of people lower down the pyramid—one thinks of Tylor, carrying on research by having his wife Anna read to him, in a country house made possible by the income from the family brass foundry, with at least the minimum of domestic servants necessary to maintain "respectable" status in mid-Victorian England. Finally, these categories had in common that their individual freedom of action was in one way or another restricted: they were kept in a status of dependency or tutelage and denied the rights of full participation in the political processes of modern civilization.

Insofar as they remained subordinate, exploited, and unfree, these social categories must have been problematic for those who identified "civilization" with the triumph of "liberal" principles and the equal freedom of all human individuals from arbitrary customary or legal restraint—as did all of the sociocultural evolutionists (as well as Sir Henry Maine). Inequalities of status within civilized society might be a methodological convenience in reconstructing the course of human development, but in a period when middle-class liberals had achieved a substantial share of political power, their continued existence was from a moral and political point of view somewhat paradoxical, if not anomalous.

Living in a society which was, and saw itself, in rapid transition, Victorian intellectuals managed to live with paradox, and even to savor it. But this paradox was one for which evolutionary thinking in fact provided a resolution. If there were still residual inequalities based on gender, class, or race in mid-Victorian society, this was a reflection of the inevitable unevenness of the processes of development, whether individual, civilizational, or biological. If those whose status was unequal were also those whose mental development had not yet achieved the rational self-control and foresight on which individual freedom ought to be premised, then there was no paradox in denying them full participation in civilized society, until such time as (if ever) their mental development justified such participation.⁹⁶

If paradox is the intellectual side of the coin of cultural ambiguity, ambivalence is its emotional obverse. In the classic analysis of the Victorian frame of mind, the opposition was treated in terms of the conflict between "the emancipated head" and the "traditional heart"—or the "critical spirit" and "the will to believe." Similar themes have been implicit throughout the present discussion of Victorian cultural ideology—notably in the response to Darwinism, in which the search for a

natural origin was balanced by the yearning for an ethical goal. Those inclined to psychohistorical interpretation might also suggest, on the basis of the earlier discussions of religion and of marriage, an ambivalence about paternal authority—with sociocultural evolutionism dethroning the father in the heavenly realm of religion, yet enthroning him in the earthly realm of marriage (where one might aspire to inherit the father's position). Be that as it may, the previous account of the experience of ontogeny and phylogeny in early-nineteenth-century England suggests a certain ambivalence in the cultural challenge to traditional forms of authority, an ambivalence which may be conceived in both psychocultural and sociopolitical terms.⁹⁷

If only at a symbolic level, we may suggest that there was an implicit psychological tension between two major cultural movements associated with the emergence of middle-class consciousness in the early nineteenth century. On the one hand, there was a political-philosophical movement which, by attacking all purely customary or traditional authorities, attempted to generalize the eighteenth-century pursuit of unrestricted rationality and individual liberty; on the other, there was a moral movement which implied certain rather severe restrictions on individual human liberty. Conceived psychologically, the goals of the middle classes thus involved simultaneously liberation and repression: on the one hand, rationality uninhibited; on the other, rationality which was explicitly inhibiting and on which the achievement of individual self-improvement, social mobility, and civilization must ultimately depend. Insofar as these processes involved the rational repression of instinctual tendencies, they involved also a sense of loss as well as gain and were the subject of ambivalence. To recapitulate those processes as evolution was at once to give a cosmic vindication to the sacrifice that repression involved, and to distance oneself from those who were unable or unwilling to make it.

A similar dualism of impulse can be seen at the sociopolitical level, where the emergence of a middle-class consciousness had both a revolutionary and a conservative dimension. On the one hand, it involved a challenge to the traditional hierarchical structure of status and authority; on the other, a grasping of the possibilities of mobility within it. Simultaneously called into question by social mobility and reasserted as measures of it, markers of class became in some respects more sharply delineated and insisted on. As the middle classes reaped the benefits of the attack on aristocratic power, and at the same time shared at least some of the benefits of an aristocratic lifestyle, they sought to distance themselves from those below. With the emergence of a "viable class society," their increasing stake in the status quo was paralleled by the attenuation of their revolutionary impulse. With the achievement of the "Victorian Compromise," they became increasingly conservative of a social order which, although retaining much of its traditional hierarchi-

cal structure, had not only accepted their social mobility, but was accommodating to them both politically and ideologically.⁹⁸

This pattern of incorporation was reflected in the realm of social theory. Earlier in the century, when middle-class groups were still struggling to achieve political power and social status, the attack against aristocratic power and feudal institutions was carried on in terms of an ahistorical utilitarianism which had no need for gradualist arguments, which rejected intuitionist and nativist assumptions as excuses for that which present utility called into question, and for which relativism was the means of attacking customs and institutions that had nothing but tradition to justify their existence. John Burrow has suggested that after mid-century, "what was required from a philosophy of history was not that it should be an engine of radical reform, but that it should provide something much more like cosmic reassurance."⁹⁹ But the need for reassurance had a worldly as well as a cosmic dimension: as middle-class groups achieved a larger stake in the political and social status quo, their intellectual spokesmen found an evolutionary gradualism more congenial to their social situation, which was directly or indirectly sustained by many of those residual inequalities of status for which sociocultural evolutionism provided an intellectual justification.

The shift can be illustrated in the career of Herbert Spencer. While he was critical of Benthamite assumption in *Social Statics*, the impulse of his own provincial radicalism was still very strong: bent on attacking feudalism and aristocracy, he actually advocated the nationalization of land. But within a few years he had backed off from this—much to the dismay of Henry George—and he modified his views on other questions as well. Tylor, Lubbock, and McLennan were also political men, active in varying degrees in the politics of the Liberal party. But they were a half generation younger, and committed to liberalism when it was the political orientation of an established rather than a rising middle class. If an antipatriarchal impulse still motivated Tylor's writings on religion and was reflected to some extent in the debate on the evolution of marriage, the radical spirit that motivated Spencer's early writings on civilization seems otherwise not much in evidence. One suspects that with the passage of time—and such events as the Second Reform Bill, the Paris Commune, and Gladstone's Irish policy—they, like many other Liberals, were increasingly troubled by the threat of mass democracy. In the case of Pitt Rivers—whose stake in the existing social order had become very large indeed—the political implications of evolutionary gradualism were made quite explicit, when he expressed the hope that public display of his sequences of artifacts would prove to the working classes that progress must come slowly: "The law that nature makes no jumps can be taught by the history of mechanical contrivances, in such a way as at least to make men cautious how they listen to scatter-brained revolutionary suggestions."¹⁰⁰

Beyond evolutionary gradualism lay a further moment in the development of evolutionary social theory: the more pessimistic social Darwinism of those who, like Galton, saw in modern society not so much an affirmative model of evolutionary process, but the evidence of a recent disjunction between social and biological evolution. Preoccupied still with the Malthusian problem, and unwilling to accept Spencer's optimistic Lamarckian gloss of the middle-class ideology of economic sexuality, they feared that modern society had facilitated what was in effect an "unnatural selection"; and to counter the tendency of the intellectually fittest to control their fertility while the lower classes multiplied like rabbits, they advocated the necessity of positive "eugenic" intervention in the evolutionary process.¹⁰¹

By contrast, the classical social evolutionists—although conscious of what Frazer later called "the volcano underneath"—saw modern civilization in more positive terms. Their evolutionism remained an essentially optimistic faith. It vindicated the rational repression of instinctual behavior that made individual mobility and social progress possible; it justified the residual inequalities of sex, class, and race which progress had not yet overcome; and insofar as it linked social processes with biological change—conceived rather more in Lamarckian than in Darwinian terms—it gave that progress an evolutionary guarantee. Theirs was an activity not unlike that of the successful early Victorian entrepreneurs who occupied their declining years "hunting up genealogies" to justify their children's entry into the landed gentry. Similarly, social evolutionism was a kind of cosmic genealogy for middle-class civilization, "hunted up" by men whose parents included such businessmen, several of whom were themselves candidates for entry in the "intellectual aristocracy" that was emerging from similar social sources in this period.¹⁰²

To suggest that sociocultural evolutionism was conditioned by such ulterior motives and served such ideological functions is not to reject the prior argument that it was an attempt to answer certain questions posed by the origin of species and the antiquity of man. It is rather to suggest that the answers to such intellectual questions could also help to provide answers to questions pressing upon evolutionists from other realms. In explaining the origin of human culture, one also explained the cultural experience embodied in the Crystal Palace Exhibition. It is therefore not surprising that answers to both sorts of questions should have been conditioned by personal and family history, class and political identification, and religious, marital, and social concerns.

Colonial Otherness and Evolutionary Theory

By the same token, to look for ulterior motivation and latent function in the domestic social experience of nineteenth-century Britain is not to

deny the relevance of British experience with non-European "others" overseas, either as a source of evolutionary assumption or as a field for its application. A number of the writers we have discussed spent time outside Europe at some point in their lives, and in the cases of Galton, Wallace, and Tylor, the formative impact of overseas experience on their anthropological viewpoints seems to have been considerable. But quite aside from personal experience, there were any number of channels through which the European experience overseas could have been a source of anthropological assumption, including the anti-slavery and missionary movements, the debates over such major colonial events as the Indian Mutiny, and all the literature they engendered. Even a confirmed stay-at-home like Spencer would have been familiar with missionary, travel, and natural historical literature long before he began having it combed for comparative data.¹⁰³

There was, in short, a close articulation, both experiential and ideological, between the domestic and the colonial spheres of otherness. Those who went out to confront (and to convert, to uplift, to exploit, or to destroy) "savages" overseas did so in the context of the domestic cultural experience we have been discussing. Thus the "systematic colonization" of New Zealand and Australia in the 1830s and 1840s was explicitly justified as an attempt to forestall domestic Malthusian crisis by exporting surplus population. Both those who traveled overseas and those who read the literature they produced reacted to the experience of "savages" abroad, whether direct or vicarious, in terms of prior experience with the changing class society of Great Britain. And for Englishmen at home and abroad, domestic class and overseas colonial society were linked by the "internal colonialism" of the Celtic fringe. Thus Ireland, especially, had since Elizabethan times provided a mediating exemplar for both attitude and policy in relations with "savages" overseas.¹⁰⁴

Emphasizing the articulation and translatability of domestic and colonial otherness, however, should not cause us to forget that there were certain fixed points and relationships on the scale by which otherness was measured. If Irishmen were portrayed in the popular press as ape-like, and savages overseas sometimes compared favorably with Irish peasants, there was no real doubt about who was at the bottom: other social categories might be like savages, but with true savages it was not a matter of similitude but of identity. And while the relative position of different savage peoples was a matter of debate—with the Fuegians, the Australians, the Andamanese, the Tasmanians, and several others included among Spencer's "Types of Lowest Races"—the general characteristics of savages were clear enough. Dark-skinned and small of stature, unattractive, unclothed and unclean, promiscuous and brutal with their women, they worshipped the spirits animating animals or even

sticks and stones—their smaller brains enclosing and enclosed within the mental world described in Spencer's chapters on the mind of primitive man.¹⁰⁵

Whatever their similarity to savagery, all manifestations of otherness within British society were contained within the bounds of what had long been regarded as a single large linguistic-cum-racial group—the Celts, the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans being all white-skinned members of the Indo-European family. But beyond the British Isles there was a larger scale of otherness on which differences were marked in racial terms, and color became an indicator of culture. Tylor's arrangement of "races" in order of their culture—Australian, Tahitian, Aztec, Chinese, Italian—was also an arrangement in terms of color saturation, from dark to light, as well as a selection from major racial groupings of mankind.¹⁰⁶

The national specificity of Tylor's highest category is worth noting—not simply because it implied an unstated higher reference point northwest across the English Channel, but because it most strikingly instances the ambiguity of the cultural and the biological in Tylor's scale. From our present anthropological perspective "Italian" denotes either a language or a nation; it is a cultural rather than a biological category. That Tylor should have spoken of the Italian (or, for that matter, of the Tahitian) "race" no doubt reflected a more pervasive looseness in the usage of the term. But like much of that usage, it could also have an implicit biological rationale in the Lamarckian (and Spencerian) assumption of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, which—as we have several times previously noted—provided a mechanism by which habitual behavior became instinctive, and cultural inheritance became part of biological heredity. Even Walter Bagehot, a writer whom we associate with "social Darwinism," and who doubted the direct influence of environment on the formation of major races, tended, when it came to mental or cultural characteristics, to blur the distinction between race and nation, and between the processes that formed them—insofar as he assumed that behavior socially transmitted by "imitation" could become part of hereditary physical makeup. In this context it is obviously oversimple to speak of "racial" as opposed to "cultural" "determinism," since what was biologically hereditary could itself be the result of cultural processes.¹⁰⁷

On the other hand, there were also "social Darwinists" like Galton who more systematically rejected Lamarckian assumption, for whom the relationship of race and culture was much less interactive (allowing, of course, for the interaction involved in eugenic intervention). For them, and others more directly in the polygenist racialist tradition, the label racial determinist seems quite appropriate. Even in the case of those whose usage seems consistent with Spencerian assumption, one must

keep in mind that once cultural habit became hereditary, it manifested itself as racial instinct—as in the case of those “races” Spencer had described as “independent or slavish, active or slothful.” Thus insofar as Spencerian Lamarckians emphasized the cumulative effect of past heredity over the moderating influence of present experience, they, too, might be appropriately called racial determinists. Certainly, race played an important subsidiary role in social evolutionary argument, insofar as it helped to explain how those present inequalities of development which made possible the use of the comparative method had arisen—why it was that although mankind was one in origin and the laws of mind were everywhere the same, not all groups had progressed to the same level, or were likely to in the future. Such differences were simply the cumulative results of varying cultural experience in different environments, which, having become racial, limited the developmental capacity of different groups. And although Lamarckian thought lent itself to the notion that instinctual mental patterns formed in earlier stages of development might gradually be modified by education in the habits of civilization, Spencer himself, when consulted by a leading Japanese statesman as to whether Japan should encourage marriage with foreigners, urged its prohibition on the grounds that interbreeding between varieties that over “many generations” had become “adapted to widely divergent modes of life” invariably produced offspring to neither.¹⁰⁸

While systematic exploration of the role of evolutionary thought in the relations of Europeans and “others” lies beyond the scope of this study, we may offer a few thoughts along these lines. The fact that Arthur Gordon carried Maine’s work to the Pacific and attempted to apply Mainian principles to the government of Fiji suggests that the evolutionary literature may have been directly functional to the colonial enterprise. But the fact that it was Maine rather than McLennan that Gordon found useful is worth noting, not only because Maine was marginal to the evolutionary school, but because he was the writer who had most to say about the kinds of problems colonial administrators had to cope with: village organization, landownership, and codes of law. By contrast, A. W. Howitt, the Australian explorer and police magistrate who collaborated with the missionary Lorimer Fison on the analysis of aboriginal social organization, clearly regarded McLennan’s writings as closet speculation, albeit the product of a fine “logical” mind. Fison himself dismissed Lubbock’s work as the sort of compilation that could be put together by anybody who could afford “to give an ordinary clerk a pound a week to make extracts from works on savage tribes in any good library.” Tylor’s work on religion and mythology might seem relevant substantively to the work of missionaries; but if we may judge from the case of Robert Codrington, who spent years with the Melanesian Mis-

sion (and who in fact attended Tylor’s lectures), they were uncomfortable with the hypothesis of animism on empirical as well as on theological grounds.¹⁰⁹

But whether or not evolutionary writings provided specific guidelines for colonial administrators and missionaries, there can be no doubt that sociocultural thinking offered strong ideological support for the whole colonial enterprise in the later nineteenth century. Pre-evolutionary buttresses were of course still in place—among them, for instance, the idea that savages merely wandered in small groups on the surface of the earth, without attempting the systematic cultivation that was required to fulfill God’s injunction to be fruitful and multiply, and had therefore no territorial claims that Europeans must respect. European penetration could also be justified in the philanthropic terms of anti-slavery and Christian mission, and effective abolition and conversion might in fact require extended European presence. But in an era when science was taking over many of the ideological functions religion had long served, a more secular justification was required: savages were not simply morally delinquent or spiritually deluded, but racially incapable. And while this racial incapacity, too, had previously been argued in non-evolutionary, polygenetic terms, these had never provided a satisfactory explanation of its origin. Evolutionary racialism did not merely assert the existence of a hierarchy of distinct races, it offered a secular explanation of how that hierarchy had arisen, and gave to it the accumulated weight of evolutionary processes in a greatly extended span of time. Cast in the terms of “natural selection” and “survival of the fittest,” evolutionary racialism was, from the European viewpoint, a grimly optimistic, but morally ambiguous doctrine, which could be used to justify the worst excesses of expropriation and colonial rule. But the peculiar advantage of a more Lamarckian evolutionism was the opening it left for an uplifting philanthropic meliorism. Civilizing efforts on behalf of dark-skinned savages could, over time, eliminate savagery from the world, not by destroying savage populations, but by modifying their hereditary incapacity. In the meantime—which might be shorter or longer depending on the weight one gave to present as opposed to cumulative past experience—it was both scientifically and morally respectable for civilized Europeans to take up the white man’s burden.¹¹⁰